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The Traits of Business Heroes in *Atlas Shrugged*

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There are many aspects of *Atlas Shrugged* that the reader can enjoy. It is a mystery with a totally original and suspenseful plot. It presents a revolutionary new philosophy that is demonstrated in action. It is a study of good against evil and an examination of the mind-body relationship from perspectives never before identified by a novelist or philosopher. It is a study of business heroes and their struggle to succeed against overwhelming odds. In the novel, of course, all these aspects are brilliantly interconnected and fully integrated.

In this chapter I will focus on the business heroes and the traits that made them great—and contrast, in limited fashion, these traits with those that characterized the business villains. The business heroes of the novel, such as Dagny Taggart, Hank Rearden, Ellis Wyatt, and Ken Danagger, were all brilliantly competent and, to the extent allowed, initially, by the altruistic society they were living in, successful. In what follows, I focus on their success and what made it possible, not on what happened later in the novel.

What traits did the heroes possess that would make successful production possible?

FOCUS ON REALITY

To the business heroes, reality is an absolute. To the villains, it is something to be evaded at all costs. Early in the book we are shown the contrast between Dagny Taggart, the Vice-President in Charge of Operation, and her brother James, the President of Taggart Transcontinental. Dagny predicts, based on her own evidence, that the Mexican government is going to nationalize Taggart's San Sebastián Line, but James refuses to consider it. His first concern is to altruistically help an underprivileged country. Facts are secondary in his mind to that wish. Further, because

Associated Steel, led by a looter, Orren Boyle, has not fulfilled its previous rail order, Dagny has ordered new rails for the Rio Norte Line made from Rearden Metal, an entirely new product that no one else had dared to order. James does not want to face reality. James's look is described at one point as "gliding off and past things in eternal resentment of their existence" (7). He does not want to think in order to form his own opinion of Rearden Metal. But Dagny is adamant, because she studied engineering and knows the metal's value. She demands that James either approve the order or refuse it. James whines: "That's the trouble with you. You always make it 'Yes' or 'No.' Things are never absolute like that. Nothing is absolute." Dagny replies: "Metal rails are. Whether we get them or not, is" (23).

No matter what setback or disaster she is faced with—the loss of key employees, contractors, and suppliers, the shortages of rail and engines, the Winston Tunnel explosion, the shortage of money needed to build the John Galt Line, the passage of productivity-destroying legislation by the government—she never once considers faking reality in any way. Every fact, no matter how unpleasant, is faced and evaluated fully and honestly.

Furthermore, every evaluation of the facts leads to action when action is necessary and possible (an issue I will expand on later). For example, when James refuses to support her plan to build the John Galt Line, which she regards as critical to the survival of Taggart Transcontinental—and to the whole country—she "officially" leaves the company and takes charge of building the line herself.

Hank Rearden is equally focused on reality. When visited by Dr. Potter from the State Science Institute, who wants him to stop producing Rearden Metal, Rearden has only one question for him: "Is Rearden Metal good or not?"(179). As with Dagny, when he is faced with setbacks such as the loss of his iron ore or copper or coal supplies, he fully accepts the facts as given and works to find new sources.

In contrast to the villains, in whose minds wishes always take precedence over facts, for the heroes reality is always primary in their thinking. At Lillian Rearden's party, a corrupt philosopher Dr. Pritchett tells a guest that "nothing is anything" (141)—which means that reality is whatever you want it to be. Soon after, Francisco explains what Dr. Pritchett's predecessor at the Patrick Henry University, Dr. Akston, taught: "that everything is something" (142). The law of identity (A is A) is ingrained into the minds of the business heroes like it was part of their DNA—only it's there by choice.

Even when they are wrong, both Dagny and Rearden act on the facts as they understand them. Dagny, knowing her own,

incredible, productive capacity, believes she can save the world with her own brilliance and energy, but fails, until late in the book, to see that she cannot succeed and is simply aiding in her own destruction. When she understands this fully, she quits—as does Rearden.

Unlike the villains, the business heroes *want to know*. Dagny wants Eddie Willers to tell her everything that has happened when she returns from being on her vacation with Rearden and after her stay in Galt's Gulch. She gets news about the railroad from him regularly when she is building the John Galt Line. In contrast, the first words we hear in the novel from James Taggart, when Eddie asks to consult with him, are: "Don't bother me, don't bother me, don't bother me." (7) James only wants to "know"—so long as he does not have to know his own motives—when he has gotten away with something dishonest such as a swindle or the crushing of a rival, such as Dan Conway or anyone who was productive, through his machinations. Otherwise he wants only to blank out existence.

Another example of the contrast between Dagny and Jim occurs later in the novel when a government thug, Cuffy Meigs, is appointed to replace Dagny after her plane crashes in Galt's Gulch. Meigs proceeds to loot the company, which Dagny discovers and reveals to Jim upon her return. Jim does not want to talk about it or deal with it. She thought: "*there* was the method of his consciousness: he wanted her to protect him from Cuffy Meigs without acknowledging Meigs' existence, to fight it without admitting its reality" (915). Dagny refuses to evade anything, including her brother's evil.

Nor does Dagny confuse the metaphysical with the man-made. She sees through Jim's unstated premise that "there is no difference between a law of nature and a bureaucrat's directive" (917). She grasps that nature must be accepted and obeyed whereas bureaucrats' directives must be evaluated by a process of thought.

Rearden wants to know the results of every experiment when he works to develop Rearden Metal, even though for many years the experiments were total failures. Ayn Rand writes: "He had never spared himself in any issue. When a problem came up at the mills, his first concern was to discover what error he had made" (128). Rearden also wants to know everything Francisco has to teach him about philosophy, including his own wrong premises concerning the mind-body relationship and his own sanctioning of the victim—the victim being himself. He grasps that such knowledge is critical to the future of his business and to his own happiness.

ABILITY AND CONFIDENCE

The business heroes in *Atlas Shrugged* are brilliantly competent. They are also aware of their own natural abilities, but not boastful about them. Ability is not a self-esteem issue for them but simply a fact of reality. (By natural ability, I mean inborn capacity, not acquired knowledge.) Dagny thinks:

> Studying mathematics, she felt quite simply and at once: "How great that men have done this" and "How wonderful that I am so good at it." It was the joy of admiration and of one's own ability, growing together. Her feeling for the railroad was the same: worship of the skill that had gone to make it, of the ingenuity of someone's clean, reasoning mind, worship with a secret smile that said she would know how to make it better someday. (51)

In school Dagny got A's in all her classes with almost no effort (100). Ability breeds confidence. She tells Eddie Willers, when she is twelve years old, that someday she will run the railroad, although she decides this for herself when she is nine (51).

She starts at a low position at the railroad but her rise is "swift and uncontested. She took positions of responsibility because there was no one else to take them" (51). She never doubts her ability to be the Vice-President in Charge of Operation of Taggart Transcontinental and make the hundreds and thousands of decisions the job requires. When she presents the plan for the Rio Norte (John Galt) Line to James, she asserts without any expression of doubt: "I will act as my own contractor. I will get my own financing. I will take full charge and sole responsibility. I will complete the line on time" (193). And she does.

Hank Rearden is equally able. One day he thinks back on the struggles he had endured to make Rearden Steel a success. "All he remembered of those jobs was that the men around him had never seemed to know what to do, while he had always known" (30).

Rearden's confidence goes beyond this, however. He says to Dagny, "You and I will always be there to save the country from the consequences of their actions" (84). Later he says, "it's we who move the world and it's we who'll pull it though" (88). Dagny agrees. They were wrong, but they came as close to achieving the impossible as anyone could have because of their extraordinary competence.

It is Francisco d'Anconia, however, who is the symbol of "pure talent" (93) in the novel:

> Francisco could do anything he undertook, he could do it better than anyone else, and he did it without effort. There was no boasting in his manner and consciousness, no thought of comparison. His attitude was not: "I can do it better than you," but simply: "I can do it." What he meant by doing was doing superlatively.
>
> No matter what discipline was required of him by his father's exacting plan for his education, no matter what subject he was ordered to study, Francisco mastered it with effortless amusement. (94)

During his summer visits to the Taggart estate, he masters baseball and driving a speedboat in no time. He also designs a system of pulleys to make an elevator to the top of a rock using a primitive form of a differential equation. He does this when he is twelve years old (93). Later, he secretly becomes the best furnace foreman Rearden ever had. And it required a brilliant mind to destroy d'Anconia Copper over many years without the public detecting it. The destruction, of course, was in the name of his freedom to produce in the future. We know that Francisco has the ability to rebuild his copper empire once he is free to do so.

John Galt is a genius inventor whose motor will someday revolutionize the production of electricity.

The self-confidence of the heroes in the novel, however, goes deeper than their scholastic or business ability. They have the confidence that comes with genuine self-esteem caused by their unceasing reliance on their power to think.[1] In a passage that would astonish modern psychologists who believe that self-esteem comes from social approval, Dagny and Rearden have the following exchange:

> "[Most women are] never sure that they ought to be wanted. I am."
>
> "I do admire self-confidence."
>
> "Self-confidence was only one part of what I said, Hank."
>
> "What's the whole?"
>
> "Confidence of my value—and yours. . . ."
>
> "Are you saying . . . that I rose in your estimation when you found that I wanted you?"
>
> "Of course."
>
> "That's not the reaction of most people to being wanted. . . . Most people feel that they rise in their own eyes if others want them."

> "I feel that others live up to me, if they want me." (375)

Contrast Dagny with her brother. James has little or no ability and does not want to try to be great, only to be thought great by others. (Note the similarity, in this respect, to Peter Keating in *The Fountainhead*.) Thus James' deception of Cherryl who believes, until she learns the truth, that he is the guiding genius behind Taggart Transcontinental. His "self-esteem" is only self-delusion.

In addition to being able and confident themselves, the heroes in *Atlas Shrugged* value—virtually worship—ability in others. Others' ability is not viewed as a threat to their self-esteem, as with the villains, but as a pre-condition of their own business success. John Galt knows this too, which is why he takes away every person of ability that Dagny and Hank—and the country—need.

Before Dagny lost Owen Kellogg, she had planned to promote him. "[S]he had always looked for sparks of competence, like a diamond prospector in an unpromising wasteland" (17). Later: "It was only in the first few years that she [Dagny] felt herself screaming silently, at times, for a glimpse of human ability" (52). Later, as society collapses, she does not have time to feel, only to act.

In Galt's Gulch one of the strikers, Andrew Stockton, says to Dagny: "Any man who's afraid of hiring the best ability he can find, is a cheat who's in a business where he doesn't belong. To me—the foulest man on earth, more contemptible than a criminal, is the employer who rejects men for being too good" (725). But the character in *Atlas Shrugged* who risks his life specifically for ability, is a pirate, Ragnar Danneskjöld. He explains to Rearden: "my only love, the only value I care to live for, is that which has never been loved by the world, has never won recognition of friends or defenders: human ability. That is the love I am serving—and if I should lose my life, to what better purpose could I give it?" (580).[2]

It must be stressed that the business heroes in *Atlas Shrugged*, like Ayn Rand in real life, despite being exceptionally talented, put enormous effort into their work. For Ayn Rand and her fictional characters, natural ability was critical, but only the starting point for adult success, not its effortless guarantee. (I will come back to the issue of effortful action in a later section.) Effort aside, however, it is obvious that some people are just more able than others, including with respect to wealth creation.[3]

Why do the heroes in the novel, and Ayn Rand, worship ability?

The answer is metaphysical. In reality, our lives depend on the capacity of men to formulate and attain productive goals. It

takes ability to create wealth or to make any great discovery. In contrast, the novel's villains fear and resent ability in others. They fear it because it makes them look inadequate—which they are. But, more fundamentally, they resent it because it means that some people achieve more success and rewards than others, which threatens their ideal of altruism.

INDEPENDENCE

Ability, in addition to rational thinking and practical success, breeds confidence. Confidence encourages independence. Independent thinking reciprocally builds confidence. The business heroes do not decide what to believe or how to act on the basis of feelings, the opinions of authority figures, or on majority opinion. They look at the facts firsthand, evaluate them firsthand, and decide what is right. Consider Dagny's response when James challenges her choice of Rearden Metal for the new rails.

> ". . . whose opinion did you take?"
> "I don't ask for opinions."
> "What do you go by?"
> "Judgment."
> "Well, whose judgment did you take?"
> "Mine." (20–21)

Later in the book Ayn Rand writes of Dagny: "She was fifteen when it occurred to her for the first time that women did not run railroads and that people might object. To hell with that, she thought—and never worried about it again" (51). Observe here that Dagny is defying the whole of society, and yet does not give it second thought. Seeking the approval of others is totally alien to her way of drawing conclusions and making decisions.

One of the best lines in *Atlas Shrugged* comes just before the first run of the John Galt Line. Dagny is asked by a reporter: "Tell me, Miss Taggart, what's going to support a seven-thousand ton train on a three-thousand ton bridge?" Dagny answers: "My judgment" (238).

Rearden recognizes her independence (and ability) when he recognizes what the initial success of the John Galt Line means: "All the roads to wealth that they're scrambling for now, it's your strength that broke them open. The strength to stand against everyone. The strength to recognize no will but your own" (268).

Independence is a trait that Rearden shares with Dagny. Early in the novel Paul Larkin is lamenting Rearden's bad press.

> "The newspapers are against you. . . ."
> "What do they write about me? . . ."

> "That your only goal is to make steel and to make money."
> "But that *is* my only goal."
> ". . . . They think that your attitude is anti-social."
> "I don't give a damn what they think." (39)

Dagny is fully conscious of his independence:

> [During the first run of the John Galt Line] She glanced at Rearden. He stood against the wall, unaware of the crowds, indifferent to admiration. He was watching the performance of track and train with an expert's intensity of professional interest; his bearing suggested that he would kick aside, as irrelevant, any thought such as "They like it," when the thought ringing in his mind was: "It works!" (243)

Rearden's independence is also revealed at his trial. He defies the conventional moral slogan—the public good—that dominates the country and the entire world in the name of his right to trade freely with other men in his own self-interest. His defiant statement: "The public good be damned" (481) is based on a statement made by William Vanderbilt, the son of a famous real-world wealth creator, Cornelius Vanderbilt,[4] and expresses Rearden's refusal to accept the morality of altruism. Even his fellow businessmen condemn him for his ideas, but he does not back down.

The business heroes are also independent because they are self-reliant. Unlike James Taggart and Orren Boyle, they seek no favors or handouts from the government and would be horrified at the thought of getting them. They want only to be left alone to do their work and take their own risks.

VISION AND PURPOSE

The term "vision" is widely used in the business world today, though the definitions of the term vary. In the context of business, I will use the term to mean seeing the future or potential value of a product, technology, or service.[5] As we will see, however, some of the heroes in the novel are visionary in an even wider sense.

Purpose refers to the conscious intent to achieve a certain end. Francisco tells Dagny when she is fifteen years old that the most depraved type of human being is: "The man without a purpose" (99). Later, Rearden says the same thing to Francisco, not realizing at this point how much Francisco, who poses as a worthless playboy, actually knows (148). But why is purpose

important? Because it motivates goal-directed action, including the actualization of a vision, and goal-directed action is the essence of life itself.[6] The man without a purpose is negating his own existence. In the most fundamental sense, he is not human even though he may physically survive owing to the purposeful actions of others. The converse of purpose is: stagnation—the state of living death.

Now consider Rearden's thoughts about his new metal:

> the one thought held immovable across a span of ten years, under everything he did and everything he saw, the thought held in his mind when he looked at the buildings of a city, at the track of a railroad, at the light in the windows of a distant farmhouse, at the knife in the hands of a beautiful woman cutting a piece of fruit at a banquet, the thought of a metal alloy that would do more than steel had ever done, a metal that would be to steel what steel had been to iron. (30)

Observe the purposeful, visionary thinking process involved here. He is considering the potential of a product that does not yet exist but which he plans to bring into existence. He is thinking of the numerous uses to which such a metal could be put.

Note also the time span involved: ten years. Dagny is equally purposeful in building the John Galt Line. Although the time span was shorter, she understands the Line's potential value. Compare Rearden and Dagny to the villains who subject the businessmen to a never-ending series of regulations without any thought (or rather the deliberate evasion) of the long-range consequences. There is no vision, only self-induced blindness. Labor leader Fred Kinnan is the most "honest" of the looters in that he does not engage in any self-deception regarding the consequences of the looters' stream of business-destroying directives. He says to them: "I'm playing the game as you've set it up and I'm going to play for as long as it lasts—which isn't going to be long for any of us!" (542). Because the government directives are based on emotion and altruism, and not reason, there is no thought about the inevitable consequences. Nor is there a desire for any thought, because that would force the villains to acknowledge the real goal of their actions: destruction for the sake of destruction.

Francisco d'Anconia knows the potential of d'Anconia Copper as well as his own ability. His initial life purpose reveals enormous ambition. In his childhood he is quizzed in a hostile manner by James Taggart, who asks "What are you after?" Francisco replies, "Money." When James asks, "Don't you have

enough?" Francisco answers, "In his lifetime, every one of my ancestors raised the production of d'Anconia Copper by about ten percent. I intend to raise it by one hundred"[7] (96).

Banker Midas Mulligan is also visionary—about men. He can see from talking to a man and looking at his record, which meant judging his character and ability, whether he is a good risk or not. He finances Rearden's business enterprises, early in Rearden's career, because he sees Rearden's potential for earning wealth. He goes on strike when a court orders him to lend money to an incompetent moocher, Lee Hunsacker. Mulligan envisions the disastrous consequences of financing men like Hunsacker instead of men like Rearden (742).

Dagny expresses her own vision to John Galt during her stay in Galt's Gulch: "I want you to know this. I started my life with a single absolute: that the world was mine to shape in the image of my highest values" (812). Her more specific purpose is to save Taggart Transcontinental from bankruptcy and then to make it grow and prosper. She has the ability and drive to succeed but has to fail ultimately in the face of the altruist code that makes success impossible. She is overconfident, because she does not see until the end of the novel that ability and effort cannot overcome a moral code that leads a person to help his enemies survive at the expense of his own life and values.

John Galt has the vision to see the potential of his motor which is based on an entirely new concept of energy and would revolutionize the production of electricity. But he is visionary on an even more fundamental scale—on a scale that, in the real world, only an Ayn Rand or her equal could grasp or formulate. Galt's broadest vision is: a complete philosophical revolution. His vision is the precondition of saving the world from destruction by establishing the foundation for all future production. He grasps that irrationalism, including altruism, is destroying the world. He identifies that altruism is the morality of death, and that the world's moral code has to be changed so that wealth creators and all men of mind, including himself, have a chance—not to mention the people of lesser ability whose survival depends on them.

Galt is also visionary in another way. He sees how his philosophy could be made to come to fruition: by convincing men of ability to refuse to work under the code of altruism and thus let altruism destroy itself.

Galt's long-range purpose then becomes, first, to drain the brains of the world so that there will be no one left to help altruism succeed and the world would collapse—a process that requires twelve years. Second, he would slash away centuries of error and present a totally new, pro-life philosophy based on reason and egoism and make possible a world in which businessmen, and all

men, were free to function. Third, he would then be free to further develop and sell his motor—and make an enormous profit.

PASSIONATE LOVE OF WEALTH CREATION

The business heroes in *Atlas Shrugged* are passionate valuers—they value their work because they value the process of thinking and creating, and, at the deepest level, the process of living itself—they love purposeful action. In her youth, Dagny "felt the excitement of solving problems . . . of taking up a challenge and then disposing of it . . . the eagerness to meet another, harder test" (51). Much later in the book, when she decides to leave the valley, she explains her reason: "I cannot bring myself to abandon to destruction all the greatness of the world, all that which was mine and yours, which was made by us and is still ours by right" (807). She loves her work too much, as well as being too confident about her ability to save the world.

Francisco then acknowledges her love for her railroad but expresses the conviction that she will eventually join the strikers: "The only man never to be redeemed is the man without passion" (808).

Rearden is not one of the irredeemable. His mooching brother Phil accuses Rearden of having a neurosis, because he loves his work so much (34). In reality, neurotic obsession with one's work does exist, but it stems from fear and self-doubt. The motivation is negative. The goal of such work is to relieve the doubt, but it does not work, because the self-doubt does not stem from lack of work achievement but from deeper feelings of inadequacy. Rearden's "obsession" with his work is healthy; it stems not from self-doubt but from positive motivation, from love for what he is doing.

It may be asked, what do the business heroes love more: the process of production or the money they make from it? The answer is: they love both. In reality the two are ultimately inseparable in the realm of business. It is through production, and only through production (direct or indirect) that wealth is created. Money, that is, currency, is only a claim on actual wealth.[8] Furthermore, the money earned through past production provides the fuel for future production.

The man who is willing to spend his career trying to produce without material rewards (e.g., for "spiritual rewards") is a martyr. In reality, a true altruist (e.g., a Mother Teresa) would not be motivated to *produce* anything. And a man like Orren Boyle, who wants to get money without earning it through production, is a looter who can only survive as a parasite. Both types are anathema to the business heroes in *Atlas Shrugged.*

There is one other possible category to consider: a man, like Mr. Mowen, who wants money but does not really enjoy the process by which he makes it, that is, does not love his work. A common cause of such a condition is mistakenly basing self-esteem on the amount of money one makes (and can show off) rather than its real cause, reliance on one's power to think.[9] Such a man is dooming himself to a lifetime of misery. His work would be drudgery, devoid of all pleasure. Nor will such a man be a creator. As Howard Roark says to Peter Keating in *The Fountainhead*, "to get things done you must love the doing."[10]

There is no dichotomy between love of production and love of money in the business heroes. They hold the same view as Francisco that, "To love money is to know and love the fact that money is the creation of the best power within you" (412). In this sense, making money, rather than being shameful, is, to the business heroes—and in reality—virtuous. Observe also Ayn Rand's total rejection of the widely held (Marxist) view that making money is a purely materialistic endeavor which has nothing to do with man's consciousness. Wealth creation, as *Atlas Shrugged* demonstrates, is the product of man's mind.[11]

The villains in the novel, of course, have a very different motivation. They have no ability to create and do not love—or more precisely, they resent—both production and money. James agrees with the Bible that (love of) money is the root of all evil. He does not have any actual (positive) values at all. He does not actually *want* money any more than he wants to have adulterous sex with Lillian Rearden. He and the other villains, however, do seek to *get*, rather than earn, money—through scheming, manipulation, and government favors. They want power for the "pleasure" of destroying the real producers. (The deepest motive of the looters and power lusters, the Morality of Death, is explained in Galt's Speech.)

COMMITMENT TO TENACIOUS ACTION

The business heroes are not content to formulate visions and feel passionate. They want to act to make the visions real, the passion to lead to something concrete. Dagny's commitment to action is shown in the first chapter of the book when she takes charge of a train stalled due to a malfunctioning signal. She felt "the hard, exhilarating pleasure of action" (17).

Later, James sarcastically says to the Board of Directors: "My dear sister does not happen to be a human being, but just an internal combustion engine" (229). His observation has an element of truth: Dagny is an internal combustion engine, one driven to persistent action by thought and values. Contrary to James's

assertion, however, she is not only human but represents the essence of what it means to be human.

During the first run of the John Galt Line she thinks:

> First, the vision—then the physical shape to express it. First, the thought—then the purposeful motion down the straight line of a single track to a chosen goal. Could one have any meaning without the other? Wasn't it evil to wish without moving—or to move without aim? (240–41)

Commitment to action persists even when the heroes are faced with seemingly insurmountable obstacles or setbacks. When Dagny learns of the new government regulations that will ultimately destroy Colorado, she is horrified. She knows that Ellis Wyatt will go on strike and that she has to try and stop him. Her unbreached determination is revealed in her thoughts at this moment:

> And because, were she lying crushed under the ruins of a building, were she torn by the bomb of an air raid, so long as she was still in existence she would know that action is man's foremost obligation regardless of anything he feels—she was able to run down the platform [to a telephone booth and try to call Wyatt]. (334)

Rearden is equally tenacious. He recalls how difficult it was to create Rearden Metal:

> —the nights spent in the workshop of his home, over sheets of paper which he filled with formulas, then tore up in angry failure . . . [his staff fighting] a hopeless battle . . . [and thinking] ". . . it can't be done."
> —the meals, interrupted and abandoned at the sudden flash of a new thought . . . to be tried . . . to be worked on for months, and to be discarded as another failure. (29)

It required ten years of unrelenting work before he succeeded. Even when he was totally exhausted, he did not quit:

> He saw an evening when he sat slumped across his desk. . . . He was tired. . . . He had burned everything there was to burn within him; he had scattered so many sparks to start so many things—and he wondered whether someone could give him

> now the spark he needed, now when he felt unable ever to rise again. He asked himself who had started him and kept him going. Then he raised his head. Slowly, with the greatest effort of his life, he made his body rise until he was able to sit upright with only one hand pressed against the desk and a trembling arm to support him. He never asked that question again. (30–31)

During the furnace breakout when Francisco and he work together to stop it, Rearden is described as having "the exultant feeling of action, of his own capacity, of his body's precision, of its response to his will" (457). Earlier in the novel he is described as having "joyous, boundless power" (40). No matter what burdens and setbacks Rearden faces—the loss of ore supplies, of coal, of copper, of competent workmen, or strangling government directives—he never stops taking action until the day goons try to take over his business by force, and Francisco explains to him the philosophical issues involved in this attack, his own past struggles, and the collapsing economy. One is reminded here of Aristotle's concept (discussed by him in a cosmological context) of the unmoved or prime mover (which was his conception of god): "If everything in motion is moved by something, and the [prime] mover is moved but not by anything else, it must be moved by itself."[12] Rearden, Dagny, and the other business heroes were self-movers in the deepest sense. They thought and acted by volitional choice.

Only when the copper suppliers on whom Rearden depended are virtually destroyed by a new set of government edicts does he temporarily lose the desire to do anything. He recalls that he had never before "reached the ultimate ugliness of abandoning the will to act" (374) even during times of struggle and suffering. But faced with the use of physical force by the government, he sees that purposeful action is, right then, impossible. By crushing the possibility of action, by paralyzing the mind, the government is crushing his spirit—his love of existence, even his desire for Dagny. But even here, he soon regains his love of the world, his desire to act and his romantic passion. His spirit is not to be destroyed by a setback.

Dagny too was temporarily bereft of any desire to act after McNamara, the only good contractor left, quit. "She felt suddenly empty of energy, of purpose, of desire, as if a motor had crackled and stopped" (65). But, like Rearden, she recovered.

Contrast Rearden and Dagny to Ben Nealy, Dagny's main contractor for the John Galt Line. Nealy does not want to destroy the producers but resents the effort that doing a good job requires, especially the effort of thinking. His belief is: "muscles—that's all

it takes to build anything in the world" (162). Ayn Rand is here alluding to Karl Marx's erroneous view that only physical labor creates value. Nealy is not a villain in the novel, but his commitment to action is much weaker than that of the heroes. He is sullen and passive in the face of obstacles and resents being held to his assigned objectives. He is not a self-mover but needs constant instruction from Dagny.

The passionate commitment to action, including the integration of thought and action, in the heroes of *Atlas Shrugged* reveals Ayn Rand's rejection of any version of the mind-body dichotomy as well as her conviction that integrity is a cardinal virtue.[13]

JUSTICE

The business heroes are uncompromisingly pro-justice. Dagny is infuriated at the destruction of a competitor, the Phoenix-Durango Railroad, by the National Railroad Alliance, a collectivistic, private organization.

Dagny and Rearden always seek the best talent available and pay everyone what they are worth. They deal with their customers through mutual self-interest. They function by what Ayn Rand calls "the trader principle," exchanging value for value through voluntary consent.

Dagny, Rearden, and the novel's other heroes do not hire or reward people who do not deserve it. For example, consider the attempt of Rearden's mother to convince him to give his worthless brother, Philip, a job. She whines:

> "He [Philip] wants to be independent of you."
>
> "By means of getting from me a salary he can't earn for work he can't do?"
>
> "You'd never miss it. You've got enough people here who're making money for you."
>
> "Are you asking me to help him stage a fraud of that kind?"
>
> ". . . You have no mercy for anybody."
>
> "Do you think a fraud of this kind would be just? . . . Don't ever speak to me again about a job for Philip." (208)

Francisco's pro-justice actions are focused on punishment rather than on reward or on the refusal to hire incompetents. The punishment, of course, is indirect. He lets the looters count on his judgment and productivity while actually withholding them. Francisco "discovers" the San Sebastián mines and the looters take it on faith that the mines must be valuable, because they know that

Francisco is involved. But they never look for any facts about the mines, nor do they investigate the political risks of investing within a socialist state. They buy up the stock only to see the mines nationalized; furthermore, the mines turn out to be worthless. The looters think they can get money through theft, without thinking. The justice here is that the looters, including the Mexican government, get exactly what they deserve: nothing.

The same thing happens later in the novel on a larger scale when d'Anconia Copper is nationalized by the People's State of Chile. The government finds that there is no d'Anconia Copper left to nationalize. Francisco has gradually and secretly destroyed it. The Chilean government gets nothing and the various looters who invested in the company lose everything. Again, the enraged looters get just what they deserve.

In a different way, Ragnar Danneskjöld also promotes justice—by correcting injustice. He turns looted wealth into gold and deposits it into accounts that he creates for the business heroes in proportion to the income taxes they have paid.

More broadly, the whole of *Atlas Shrugged* is a hymn to justice. The altruists loot and undermine every man of ability that they can get their hands on, until there are no more victims to be found. John Galt has taken them away. The victims have withdrawn their sanction. The looters then suffer the logical and just consequences of their corrupt philosophy: the total collapse of society. In organizing the strike, John Galt is the prime orchestrator of justice on a world scale. At a deeper level, however, the avenger in the novel is reality itself. The looters are trying to practice a contradiction. They want to enforce altruism, an irrational and antilife moral doctrine, through coercion and to get wealth (at least temporarily), while at the same time destroying freedom and thus making production of wealth—and life—impossible.

On the positive side, Galt's speech gives the producers the justice they deserve: the recognition of their morality.

MOTIVE POWER AND THE PROFIT MOTIVE

The term "motive power" is used throughout the novel. When first introduced, it refers to the need for engines to power Taggart Transcontinental trains. James Taggart, trying to explain why the railroad is running just one, coal-burning engine a day on the San Sebastián Line, explains: "we had a little trouble with our motive power" (49). Dagny thinks, "Motive power . . . rested on the engines that rolled across a continent" (64). Eddie Willers, still referring to engines, makes a more profound statement than he realizes: "Motive power—you can't imagine how important that is. That's the heart of everything" (63).

The term, even when used in the context of engines, is really a metaphor. Its deeper meaning (which James, Eddie, and even Dagny are unaware of) pertains to the motivation of men. Dagny talks about being "the motive power of her own happiness" (65), but does not identify the root issue. Francisco identifies it for Rearden: "Man's motive power is his moral code" (455). The moral code of the business heroes is: rational egoism, the code that makes it possible to produce engines—and everything else on which man's life depends. Given their motive power in the realm of morality, the business heroes are prime movers of the economy. They are to the country what the engines are to the train.

The business heroes possess motive power in abundance. Rearden feels no guilt about the fact that he is working for himself. He tells Francisco at Lillian's party: "the man who works, works for himself. . . . I don't want any part of that tripe about working for others. I'm not" (147).

In his conversation with Dr. Potter of the government's State Science Institute, who wants to buy the rights to (stop making) his Metal, Potter asks, "why do you want to struggle for years, squeezing out your gains in the form of pennies per ton . . . Why?" Rearden answers, "Because it's *mine*" (181). At his trial, Rearden, to the astonishment of the judges and the courtroom audience, asserts, "I work for nothing but my own profit" (480).

There is one point at which Rearden tells Dagny: "We're a couple of blackguards, aren't we?" (87). Later he says to Francisco "you're thinking . . . that I'm selfish, conceited, heartless, cruel. I am" (147). What he means is that Dagny and he are evil according to conventional morality (altruism). However, Rearden does not really believe, deep down, that he is a blackguard. He does not experience any genuine guilt about his business—in contrast to what he feels about his relationship with his wife.

Rearden's unjust burden is symbolized early in the novel after he gives Lillian a bracelet made from the first batch of Rearden Metal: "'A chain,' she said. 'Appropriate, isn't it? It's the chain by which he holds us all in bondage'" (43). The irony of this statement is only revealed later. It is Rearden who is in bondage to his family, whose contemptuous treatment of him he sanctioned for years, because he did not understand the evil of their moral code nor the virtue of his own. Even in business, though free of fundamental guilt, he cannot experience full moral pride, because he does not understand how virtuous he is.

Rearden's implicit philosophy is correct, but like the other business heroes, he cannot validate it. They do not know how to identify or defend their virtues philosophically. As Francisco explains to Rearden: "You have been willing to carry the load of an unearned punishment—and to let it grow the heavier the greater

the virtues you practiced. . . . Your own moral code—the one you lived by but never stated, acknowledged or defended—was the code that preserves man's existence" (455). Galt's speech provides the full validation of rational egoism.

Dan Conway presents an intermediate case of motive power. He is a good businessman who selfishly loves his work, but he does not have enough motive power to protest being sacrificed by the National Railroad Alliance. He accepts, at some level, the legitimacy of collectivism (what he calls "majority rule") even while hating it. As a result he is unable to act when confronted by a monstrous injustice.

The villains in the novel possess no motive power at all. They possess only one weapon: knowing how to cash in on the morality of altruism, and thereby to get the men of mind to serve them by sanctioning a wrong moral code. The villains exploit their philosophically helpless victim—until John Galt and his allies identify and validate the moral code held subconsciously by the producers.

Galt convinces them to withdraw their sanction and thereby stops the motor of the world. The ultimate motor was not an engine but an idea: genuine moral virtue—rational egoism.

CONCLUSION

In today's intellectual climate, just as "business ethics" is considered an oxymoron, so is it considered ludicrous to pair "making money" and "virtue." Moneymaking is widely considered to be a product of irrational, mindless greed and dishonesty. The selfish pursuit of profit is considered axiomatically to be evil and altruism to be good. No moral credit is given for making money, only for giving it away. This is called "giving back," as though you took something that you had no right to.

Atlas Shrugged smashes these distortions and misconceptions at root.

Making money, which means creating wealth, is shown to be caused by virtue. But the virtues involved are not the conventional ones such as altruism, piety, mercy, and faith. The core virtue is rationality, which includes taking reality seriously, which requires honesty. Other corollaries of reason include independence (reliance on one's own judgment), integrity (taking actions consistent with one's judgment), and justice. Productiveness is a consequence of reasoned action. Pride is the sum of all virtues. (Of course, these virtues are not only for making money. They apply to every sphere of human functioning.)

Ability too is required to earn money. Wealth is not created by mindless manual labor but by creative intelligence, which

includes the ability to envision products or services that customers value. Wealth creators must value ability in others because any business exceeding a one-man shop requires the work of other (even hundreds or thousands of) individuals. Ability alone, of course, is not enough. Long-term effort and tenacious action are required to make ability pay off.

Finally, the wealth creator must have a profoundly selfish interest in his work. He must put forth enormous effort, passionately love what he does, and value the rewards productivity brings, including money.

These traits are not mere fictions applicable only in the universe of *Atlas Shrugged.* The traits that made the business heroes in *Atlas Shrugged* successful are the same traits that make real-life businessmen successful.[14] But this earthshaking novel provides something which, prior to its publication, no real businessman ever had: an explicit validation of the morality of wealth creation, which means: of capitalism.

John Galt's great gift to the businessman was this:

> I have called out on strike the kind of martyrs who had never deserted you before. I have given them the weapon they had lacked: the knowledge of their own moral value. I have taught them that the world is ours, whenever we choose to claim it, by virtue and grace of the fact that ours is the Morality of Life. They, the great victims who had produced all the wonders of humanity's brief summer, they, the industrialists, the conquerors of matter, had not discovered the nature of their right. They had known that theirs was the power. I taught them that theirs was the glory. (1051)

NOTES

1. See Edwin A. Locke, "The Educational, Psychological, and Philosophical Assault on Self-Esteem," *Objective Standard*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 2006–2007, 65–82.

2. One might ask why Ayn Rand put such stress on natural ability—as opposed to acquired ability or skill. The explanation could be partly autobiographical. She taught herself to read. She was a brilliant student from a very young age. She found school boring and secretly wrote novels in class. Like Dagny, she excelled in mathematics. At the age of twelve she identified conceptually the process of thinking in principles and the use of reason. She also rejected the ethics of altruism. And at the age of thirteen she chose atheism over religion, based on her previous discovery of reason. In college, which she entered at sixteen,

she was intelligent enough to see the value of Aristotle's philosophy and its superiority to other philosophies. (See Jeff Britting, *Ayn Rand* [New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2004] for a short biography of Ayn Rand.) She rejected Plato's ideas and indicated to her professor that she had her own ideas about philosophy. She was already confident that her ideas would become part of the history of philosophy. There is no doubt that Ayn Rand was a prodigy who had supreme confidence in herself. She had to know that not just anyone could achieve what she achieved.

However, it is also clear from the events of her own life that natural ability, by itself, did not imply an easy road to practical or career success. In her life in America she endured a terribly difficult struggle, not only to earn a living but to become a successful writer—a writer whose philosophy defied the entire Judeo-Christian ethic. She worked endless hours for decades on her writing—and had to master a new language to do it. It took her seven years to write *The Fountainhead* and thirteen years to write *Atlas Shrugged.*

3. See Edwin A. Locke, *The Prime Movers: Traits of the Great Wealth Creators*, second edition (Irvine, Calif.: Ayn Rand Institute Press, forthcoming).

4. Locke, *Prime Movers.*

5. Locke, *Prime Movers.*

6. Ayn Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness: A New Concept of Egoism* (New York: Signet, 1964).

7. A technical clarification is needed here. Assuming production increases are roughly proportional to profit increases, increasing production/profits by ten percent in a lifetime would be extremely poor performance. Consider a forty-year career as CEO—that would be an increase in profits of only 0.25 percent per year, which would be virtual stagnation. An increase of 100 percent over forty years would only be 2.5 percent per year—which would also be considered relatively poor performance. In business an increase in profits of 10 percent per year is considered good performance. I believe that Ayn Rand could have meant the percentage increases to be annual. A 100 percent per year increase, though not sustainable indefinitely, could be sustained for many years by a brilliant businessman starting from a low enough base. Technical issues aside, however, the best way to interpret the above quote is that Francisco is markedly more able, confident, and ambitious than his family predecessors.

8. See Ayn Rand, "Egalitarianism and Inflation," *The Ayn Rand Letter*, Vol. III, Nos. 18–20, and the "Money Speech" in *Atlas Shrugged* (410–15).

9. See Locke, "Educational, Psychological, and Philosophical Assault on Self-Esteem."

10. Ayn Rand, *The Fountainhead* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1943; Signet fiftieth anniversary paperback edition, 1993), 578.

11. See Locke, *Prime Movers.*

12. Aristotle, *Physics* VIII 5, in J. Barnes, ed., *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Vol. 1 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 428.

13. For a discussion of the virtue of integrity, see Leonard Peikoff, *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1991), 259–67.

14. See Locke, *Prime Movers.*