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## Discovering Atlantis

### *Atlas Shrugged's* Demonstration of a New Moral Philosophy

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I think I'm discovering a new continent. . . . A continent that should have been discovered along with America, but wasn't. (438)

Hank Rearden has just had Floyd Ferris ejected from his office, refusing to succumb to his attempt at blackmail, and he has seen a connection between this blackmail attempt and the manner in which his wife Lillian is attempting to punish him for his adultery. This is an important step in what he will later describe as his "liberation from guilt." Rearden's description of what he's discovering as a "new continent" is an allusion to Atlantis, which had been associated with America earlier in the novel (153–54), by an old spinster who claimed that the mysterious John Galt had found the lost island. Atlantis becomes a recurring symbol in parts II and III, and, in his radio speech, Galt describes it (along with several similar legends) as representing "a radiant state of existence" (1058) which most men experience only in early childhood or isolated moments of their adult life. To maintain this state, Galt explains, requires a moral philosophy which is implicit in America's founding and in the lives of men such as Hank Rearden, but which Galt himself was the first to define and implement consistently.

For some time prior to his encounter with Ferris, Rearden feels "a strange excitement . . . as if he were on the trail of some discovery still too distant to know, except that it had the most immense importance he had ever glimpsed" (366), and in the present scene he "discovers another step along his half-glimpsed trail" (435). The trail leads to Galt's philosophy; and, unbeknownst to Rearden, Galt is facilitating his progress. He does this in part through his agent, Francisco d'Anconia, and in part by creating a social and economic circumstance in which the nature and consequences of the prevailing moral code are increasingly obvious, and the contrast between it and Rearden's own code of values is increasingly stark.<sup>1</sup>

Galt has called a secret strike of the men of the mind against this prevailing moral code and in the name of his new philosophy. *Atlas Shrugged* opens in the tenth year of this strike and follows Dagny Taggart and Hank Rearden, the last significant scabs, over the course of three years, as they learn of and are won over to Galt's cause. Their joining the strike precipitates the full collapse of society and clears the road for the men of the mind to return to the world and rebuild it on the right philosophical foundation (1168). But before Dagny or Rearden can be ready to join the strike they must discover the truth of Galt's philosophy and why it requires this

drastic action. And the reader must discover this too, if he is to understand the characters' motivations and the logic of the plot. It is for this reason that Rand includes "the demonstration of a new moral philosophy" in her statement of the novel's theme.<sup>2</sup>

In philosophical contexts especially, "to demonstrate" means to *prove*; and since a theme is an essentialized statement of "a novel's abstract meaning,"<sup>3</sup> to say that demonstrating a moral philosophy is part of *Atlas Shrugged's* theme is to say that proving this philosophy is essential to the novel. This is a striking thing for Rand to hold, since she argued in other contexts that, though art often does prove or teach philosophical principles, this is a consequence, rather than a part of, its purpose: "since every art work has a theme, it will necessarily convey some conclusion, some 'message,' to its audience. But that influence and that 'message' are only secondary consequences. *Art is not the means to any didactic end.*"<sup>4</sup> The demonstration of a moral code is essential to *Atlas Shrugged*, however, because of the role it plays in the novel's plot. *Atlas* dramatizes "the role of the mind in man's existence" by showing Galt's strike—an action that is explicitly motivated by a philosophy and accomplished by convincing the other men of the mind of its truth.

Dagny and Rearden in particular are convinced by a complex train of reasoning extended over the years in which the novel is set—a chain of reasoning that both arises from and gives rise to the actions that constitute the novel's plot.<sup>5</sup> This train of reasoning is *Atlas Shrugged's* demonstration of a new moral philosophy, and one needs to follow it in order to fully appreciate the novel, either as a work of literature or as a work of philosophy. My project here is to outline this progression and to highlight some of its most important developments, bringing out the order in which the principles are established and some of the relations between them. In doing so, I hope to give readers a sense of the whole and to introduce them to a way of reading and thinking about the novel that will enable them to better appreciate, enjoy, and learn from it. In particular, I will discuss: how Rearden grasps and applies the principle of the sanction of the victim; Dagny's sharpening identification of the premise that ties her to the looters' world; and the final realizations that lead Dagny and Rearden to join the strike. Before taking up these topics it will be instructive to discuss some preliminaries concerning the way in which *Atlas Shrugged* demonstrates principles and, more generally, how it is possible for a novel to demonstrate anything at all.

## ***ATLAS SHRUGGED AS A WORK OF PHILOSOPHY***

I have already indicated that Rearden and Dagny reach their conclusions on the basis of the events that constitute the novel's plot: they observe and reflect on the effects of the strike and the differences made stark by it between themselves and the villains and between their own values and the prevailing moral code. It is on the basis of these same observations that the reader too is supposed to become convinced of Galt's philosophy. However, since the events of the novel are fictitious, the reader—unlike the characters living in the universe of the novel—cannot take these events as facts and assume that generalizations reached from them will apply in the real world. Novelists routinely depict events or situations that could not occur. For example, one finds in fiction many socialist utopias replete with ever-improving technology and happy citizens—something that Rand argues is impossible. Of course, the existence of these societies in fiction does not prove Rand wrong on this point, and, by the same token, the mere fact that socialism fails in her novels does not prove that it must fail in reality.

How then can a novel prove anything? Novels—or at least Romantic novels, such as Rand’s—do not simply portray situations and events haphazardly. They show some events as *following* from others and from facts about the circumstances and characters—especially from the characters’ choices.<sup>6</sup> As readers we can assess whether these events do in fact follow from such causes, and we can consider whether the causes—the kinds of characters and circumstances presented in the novel—actually exist.

Of course we rarely if ever encounter in the real world people or situations exactly like those in novels. This is true even of Naturalistic novels, which aim to mirror real-life circumstances, and it is all the more true of Romantic novels, which aim to project a world grander than that of day-to-day life. However, if the characters, circumstances, and events in a work of fiction are not journalistic reproductions of real things, neither are they entirely divorced from them. As Rand observed, an artist *stylizes* reality by “isolating and stressing” those elements of it that he regards as significant and “omitting the insignificant and accidental.”<sup>7</sup> As a result of this stylization, a work of fiction can make salient causal connections that, though not obvious in the real world, can be easily observed there once our attention has been called to them.<sup>8</sup> It is in this way that fiction can demonstrate, for example, that socialism cannot succeed. By depicting a world in which the facts that lead to this conclusion stand in sharper relief than they do amidst the train of accidental minutiae that constitutes so much of daily life, *Atlas Shrugged* helps us to notice these facts and their implications.

We can, then, draw conclusions from the events in a novel, just as the characters do, and apply these conclusions to our world and our lives, when we can identify in our world the facts from which these conclusions follow. But we cannot apply conclusions about the world of a novel to our own without doing this. We would not, for example, decide based on the events of *Atlas Shrugged* that we ought to buy or sell shares of Taggart Transcontinental, when in fact there is no such company. Similarly, we should not conclude from the novel that the proper course of action in America today is to go on strike.

In interviews, Rand said that it would not be proper or necessary to withdraw from the world until a dictatorship was established that banned free speech, because after this point it would be impossible to fight a battle of ideas within society. Certainly such a dictatorship was in power by the end of *Atlas Shrugged*, but this was not yet the case when Galt initiated his strike.<sup>9</sup> Galt calls for a strike before there is a dictatorship because the universe in which he lives is different from ours in some respects. In her early notes for the novel, Rand described the strike as an element of “fantasy.”<sup>10</sup> It would not be possible for one man to recruit and organize all the productive men as Galt does—much less for him to do it secretly and within a single generation.

There are too many such people in the real world, and, whereas, in the novel, most characters are either black or white—producers or parasites—in reality, there are many more shades of gray. Consider, for example, Warren Buffet and Bill Gates, both of whom produced fortunes in innovative and honest ways but also advocated for welfare-statist measures. Again, the founders of Google created major values with their search engine and other services, but they also used antitrust legislation to persecute Microsoft, and they collaborated with the Chinese government’s censors. Such mixed people can be analyzed in terms of black and white elements: their productive actions have the same sorts of motivations and consequences as do Rearden’s, though they sometimes act in the manner of Orren Boyle.<sup>11</sup> In a world where so many of the great producers are mixed in this way, a strike such as Galt’s is not possible, even if it were otherwise logistically feasible.

Thus, the specific conclusion that Dagny and Rearden reach—that they should go on strike—is not applicable in our world. What *Atlas Shrugged* demonstrates is not this conclusion, but rather a philosophy that necessitates a strike in the world of the novel but different actions in our world. Rand went on to write many nonfiction articles and books concerning the application of her philosophy to actual events, and I will make occasional reference to such real-world applications later in this essay. For the most part, however, I will confine myself to the world and events of the novel and the conclusions that the heroes draw from them. Before turning to these heroes and tracing their development, it will be instructive to consider holistically the nature of what they learn and the structure of the novel.

What Rearden and Dagny (and the reader) discover over the course of the novel is not a collection of isolated points, but a philosophy—a complex system of abstract principles by which one can guide one’s life. The novel progresses from comparatively concrete points to increasingly abstract principles that integrate and explain them. I alluded earlier to the novel’s demonstration that socialism cannot work. This is not a point that any of the heroes need to learn; it is one of a number of moral and political convictions that they share from the beginning of the novel. Such convictions motivate Dagny and Rearden’s actions across part I, during which the reader is given several demonstrations of their truth. In part II, Dagny and Rearden come to see these convictions as components of a *moral code* that makes life possible. The events, premises, and characters from part I are reconceived in part II in terms of the alternative between this moral code and its antithesis—thus the part’s title, “Either-Or.”<sup>12</sup> This new, integrative perspective gives Dagny and Rearden a deeper understanding of themselves and of the villains, it motivates them to actions they could not have taken in part I, and it enables them to interpret the results of their actions in ways that lead to further realizations. As a result of this, in part III, they come to see the opposite moral codes as expressions of opposite attitudes towards existence as such; and it is grasping this and everything that follows from it that motivates them to join the strike. Recall how Galt describes the strikers’ position: “We, the men of the mind, are now on strike against you in the name of a single axiom, which is the root of our moral code, just as the root of yours is the wish to escape it: the axiom that *existence exists*” (1015). Thus, while part II is essentially *moral*, part III is essentially *metaphysical*, which is why it has as its name the “formula” that Galt tells us “defines the concept of existence”: “A is A” (1015).<sup>13</sup>

The difference between the three parts is especially clear when one compares the way the same issues are treated across them. For example: in part I, we see numerous examples of Rearden and Dagny acting (both in business and in their personal lives) as traders to mutual advantage, and we see how the villains’ demands for sacrifice lead to destruction. Already in part I, Rearden opposes many of the calls for sacrifice, but he does something markedly different during his courtroom speech in part II, when, after arguing that “nobody’s good can be achieved at the price of human sacrifices,” he concludes:

It is not your particular policy that I challenge, but your moral premise. If it were true that men could achieve their good by means of turning some men into sacrificial animals, and I were asked to immolate myself for the sake of creatures who wanted to survive at the price of my blood, if I were asked to serve the interests of society apart from, above and against my own—I would refuse. I would reject it as the most contemptible evil, I would fight it with every power I possess, I would fight the whole of mankind, if one minute were all I could last before I were murdered, I would fight in the full confidence of the justice of my battle and of a living being’s right to exist. Let there be no misunderstanding

about me. If it is now the belief of my fellow men, who call themselves the public, that their good requires victims, then I say: The public good be damned, I will have no part of it! (481)

Rearden rejects sacrifice as such as impractical and evil, and he sees it as the consequence of an evil *moral premise*. As we will see in greater detail later, this is not something that he would have been able to do earlier in the novel. Now contrast this with Galt's discussion of conflicts of interest early in part III of the novel:

Did it ever occur to you, Miss Taggart, that there is no conflict of interests among men, neither in business nor in trade nor in their most personal desires—if they omit the irrational from their view of the possible and destruction from their view of the practical? There is no conflict, and no call for sacrifice, and no man is a threat to the aims of another—if men understand that reality is an absolute not to be faked, that lies do not work, that the unearned cannot be had, that the undeserved cannot be given, that the destruction of a value which is, will not bring value to that which isn't. The businessman who wishes to gain a market by throttling a superior competitor, the worker who wants a share of his employer's wealth, the artist who envies a rival's higher talent—they're all wishing facts out of existence, and destruction is the only means of their wish. If they pursue it, they will not achieve a market, a fortune or an immortal fame—they will merely destroy production, employment and art. A wish for the irrational is not to be achieved, whether the sacrificial victims are willing or not. But men will not cease to desire the impossible and will not lose their longing to destroy—so long as self-destruction and self-sacrifice are preached to them as the practical means of achieving the happiness of the recipients. (798)

Here conflicts of interest are seen as arising not simply from a false moral premise, but, more deeply, from the denial that reality is absolute—that is, from a false metaphysical premise.

We will see further evidence of the progression between the three parts later, when we turn to the details of Rearden and Dagny's development. For now, as a further indication, we can note that the frequency of the words "moral" and "evil" more than triples between parts I and II, and that between parts II and III, the frequency of metaphysical terms such as "reality" and "existence" triples.<sup>14</sup>

Since it is primarily in the last two parts of the novel that the philosophical principles are articulated, my focus will be there. It will be helpful at the outset, however, to comment briefly on part I, which provides the context for what follows. It is the story of Dagny Taggart's greatest achievement and its consequences. We see in great detail how the John Galt Line is the product of her and Rearden's virtue, and we see why the Line is necessary to save the Colorado industrialists and, with them, Taggart Transcontinental and the nation. We also see how the Line, in fact, serves to hasten the destruction of these very industrialists: the bonds they invest in it are "frozen," thus depriving them of crucially needed assets; and regulations on the size, speed, and frequency of trains prevent them from getting the transportation their businesses need to survive (333–35). The fate of the Line is a paradox—an apparent contradiction—which Dagny and Rearden must come to understand in parts II and III of the novel. In order to do so they will need, in the words of Akston and Francisco, to "check their premises" (199, 331, 489, 618, 737, 807).<sup>15</sup>

## REARDEN'S LIBERATION FROM GUILT

Rearden first feels the excitement of being “on the trail of some discovery still too distant to know” at the beginning of part II, during his interview with the nameless bureaucrat who looks like a “traffic cop” and tries to intimidate him into selling Rearden Metal to the State Science Institute. The bureaucrat keeps up the pretense that the interview is “an amicable discussion,” and reacts with a mixture of bewilderment and fear when Rearden, refusing to maintain this pretense, states that he only granted the interview under the threat of arrest, which is the traffic cop’s “ultimate argument against” him and is “implied by every sentence in this discussion.” It is in observing this reaction that Rearden first glimpses the trail, and he pursues it by challenging the bureaucrat to seize his metal openly by force, as he would have to without Rearden’s help pretending that the transaction is a sale. The result is an “instinctive, involuntary cry”—“Good God, Mr. Rearden, what would the public think!”—and Rearden knows that he has taken “the right steps down the trail he had glimpsed” (366).

Shortly after the event, Rearden has a discussion with Dagny from which we can learn what he does and does not understand at this point. He describes the bureaucrat as “scared way deep”:

Of what? I don’t know—public opinion was just his name for it, but it’s not the full name. Why should he have been scared? He has the guns, the jails, the laws—he could have seized the whole of my mills, if he wished, and nobody would have risen to defend me, and he knew it—so why should he have cared what I thought? But he did. It was I who had to tell him that he wasn’t a looter, but my customer and friend. That’s what he needed from me. (377)

Rearden is a victim of the State Science Institute, and the bureaucrat needs his help to pretend that this is not the case.

Rearden immediately recognizes this same phenomenon at work when Dagny describes her unexplained feeling that she should not have called Robert Stadler (377, cf. 353). Stadler, Rearden says, wanted a “recognition” from her “that he was still the Dr. Robert Stadler he should have been but wasn’t and knew he wasn’t.”

He wanted you to grant him your respect, in spite of and in contradiction to his actions. He wanted you to juggle reality for him, so that his greatness would remain, but the State Science Institute would be wiped out, as if it had never existed—and you’re the only one who could do it for him. . . . Because you’re the victim. (377)

The State Science Institute was created “as a personal present” from the nation to Stadler, who had used his prestige to advocate for it (186). In part I, it issued a slanderous statement about Rearden Metal that made it impossible for Taggart Transcontinental to complete the Rio Norte Line, which was to be made out of Rearden Metal rails. Dagny was able to complete the line only by leaving the job that had been her life’s goal and forming an independent company, finding independent investors (whose investment was eventually seized by order of Wesley Mouch), and running herself ragged for months. Stadler knew that the Institute’s statement was false and unscientific, but refused to repudiate it when Dagny confronted him. The call she felt she should not make occurred a year later. Though she did not know this, it came moments after

he declined to repudiate a book, published under the auspices of the Institute, that distorted his own scientific work into a profane attack on the mind. As a result he felt, “in the fog of a pain that he would not define,” “the desperate feeling that no one—of those he valued—would ever wish to see him again”; and he realized that he had to wish that Galt, “the man he longed to see more than any other being in the world,” was dead and so unable to learn of his shameful action (348). This is the context in which he eagerly accepted Dagny’s invitation for a meeting; these are the facts that he wanted Dagny to juggle out of existence for him.

Rearden’s identification of what Stadler and the bureaucrat want begins to sum up and explain these events and numerous smaller episodes in the novel; and this is why, when making the identification, he feels “a sudden, violent clarity of perception, as if a surge of energy were rushing into the activity of sight, fusing the half-seen and half-grasped into a single shape and direction.” He identifies his present state of understanding as follows:

Dagny, they’re doing something that we’ve never understood. They know something which we don’t, but should discover. I can’t see it fully yet, but I’m beginning to see parts of it. . . . I don’t know what it is that they think they accomplish—but they want us to pretend that we see the world as they pretend they see it. They need some sort of sanction from us. I don’t know the nature of that sanction—but, Dagny, I know that if we value our lives, we must not give it to them. If they put you on a torture rack, don’t give it to them. Let them destroy your railroad and my mills, but don’t give it to them. Because I know this much: I know that that’s our only chance. (377–78)

Dagny agrees: “I can’t understand their game, but this much is right: We must not see the world as they want us to see it. It’s some sort of fraud, very ancient and very vast—and the key to break it is to check every premise they teach us, to question every precept, to—” (378) She stops because “her next words would have been the ones she did not want to say to him”; she has realized the connection between the issue at hand and another path of discovery along which Rearden is traveling—his “struggle for deliverance” with which she must “help him in every way except in words” (376). We will come to this struggle and its relation to Rearden’s present discovery shortly. For now, we can observe that he is struggling against “some sort of perversion in what we’re taught, some error that’s vicious and very important” (372, 373). Dagny understands the nature of this error more fully than does Rearden, and it is her observation of his struggle against it, along with the principle of premise-checking taught to her by Francisco and Akston, that enables her to identify the way in which she and Rearden must proceed on the present issue.

Let’s take stock, now, of what Rearden does and does not understand. He knows that the looters keep up a pretense to themselves about their own nature and actions; that for some reason they need their victims’ complicity in this pretense; and that by giving it, the victims grant the looters some sort of sanction. He does not know why the looters need this or the nature of the sanction involved. These answers will come as he progresses further down his trail.

Rearden makes his next significant discovery in the following chapter, when he grasps the point that Dagny refrained from telling him: that there is a connection between his conflict with the looters and his personal conflict over his affair. This occurs during his illegal sale of Rearden Metal to Ken Danagger:

He thought that he had been made to hide, as a guilty secret, the only business transaction he had enjoyed in a year's work—and that he was hiding, as a guilty secret, his nights with Dagny, the only hours that kept him alive. He felt that there was some connection between the two secrets, some essential connection which he had to discover. He could not grasp it, he could not find the words to name it, but he felt that the day when he would find them, he would answer every question of his life. (384)

Now aware that there is an essential connection between the conflicts in his professional and personal lives, Rearden begins increasingly to apply things he learns in one sphere to the other, and even when Rearden doesn't draw the connections himself, the reader's attention is called to them. Thus, before we proceed further in our discussion of his conflict with the looters, we need to look at Rearden's personal life.

The family he supports trivializes the productive achievements that are Rearden's central purpose in life and subjects him to constant moral censure for his selfishness and lack of nonmaterial values. In part I, he regards their views about business, and those of the whole world, as "tripe" and remains guiltlessly committed to his business; but they nonetheless influence his conception of himself. Most notably he agrees with the accusation that he is evil and describes himself and Dagny as "a couple of blackguards" who "haven't any spiritual goals or qualities" and care only for "material things" (147, 87).

The worst insults come from his wife Lillian, who shows disdain not only for his work, but also for his sexual appetite, to which she acquiesces with a condescending indifference. Rearden cannot understand what she sought from the marriage: she shows no affection for him but has not tried to exploit him materially. He concludes that she must be motivated by a love that he cannot comprehend. Thus, though he has come to despise her, he can find no grounds on which to condemn her. Because of this, and because he himself thinks that sex is depraved, he accepts the torture of their marriage as his own fault and cannot justify leaving her (159–60).

Through his relationship with Dagny, for which he initially damns himself, Rearden discovers by degrees the spiritual meaning of sexual desire, learns that the enjoyment of sensual pleasures has its root in spiritual values, and comes to see the connections between his desires for such pleasures and the qualities on which he prides himself in his professional life. Throughout this process his contempt for Lillian grows. Already at the end of part I, we see an anticipation in his dealings with her of the method he employs with the traffic cop. In response to a belittling remark about his manufacturing plumbing pipes, he asks: "[W]hy do you keep making those cracks? I know that you feel contempt for the plumbing pipes. You've made that clear long ago. Your contempt means nothing to me. Why keep repeating it?" (308). Noticing that this "hit her" in some manner that he does not understand, he wonders "why he felt with absolute certainty that *that* had been the right thing to say" (308).

Lillian's next appearance occurs early in part II, moments after Rearden sees the connection between his two guilty secrets. She arrives unannounced at his hotel room and demands that he escort her to Jim Taggart's wedding, though she knows that he despises such occasions:

I've asked nothing of you. I've let you live your life as you pleased. Can't you give me one evening? Oh, I know you hate parties and you'll be bored. But it means a great deal to me. Call it empty, social vanity—I want to appear, for once, with my husband. I suppose you never think of it in such terms, but you're an



important man, you're envied, hated, respected and feared, you're a man whom any woman would be proud to show off as her husband. You may say it's a low form of feminine ostentation, but that's the form of any woman's happiness. You don't live by such standards, but I do. Can't you give me this much, at the price of a few hours of boredom? Can't you be strong enough to fulfill your obligation and to perform a husband's duty? Can't you go there, not for your own sake, but mine, not because *you* want to go, but only because I want it? (386)

The cost to Rearden is higher than Lillian realizes. Rearden knows that Dagny will be at the wedding and he would rather die than "let her see him as the husband proudly being shown off," but "because he had accepted his secret as guilt and promised himself to take its consequences" and "because he granted that the right was with Lillian" he agrees to go (386).<sup>16</sup> He has made a contract with Lillian and he is duty bound to honor it—though, now sensitive to the parallels between his professional and personal life, it occurs to him "that in business transactions the courts of law did not recognize a contract wherein no valuable consideration had been given by one party to the other" (398).

Rearden recalls Lillian's demand later that evening, when Dagny explains why she does not resent his marriage and was not hurt by his attendance at the wedding:

Hank, I knew you were married. I knew what I was doing. I chose to do it. There's nothing you owe me, no duty you have to consider. . . . I want nothing from you except what you wish to give me. Do you remember that you called me a trader once? I want you to come to me seeking nothing but your own enjoyment. So long as you wish to remain married, whatever your reason, I have no right to resent it. My way of trading is to know that the joy you give me is paid for by the joy you get from me—not by your suffering or mine. I don't accept sacrifices and I don't make them. . . . If ever the pleasure of one has to be bought by the pain of the other, there better be no trade at all. A trade by which one gains and the other loses is a fraud. You don't do it in business, Hank. Don't do it in your own life. (425)

Reflecting on the difference between Dagny's words and Lillian's, he begins to see "the distance between the two, the difference in what they sought from him and from life" (426), though he will not fully grasp what Lillian wants from life until well into part III, and he continues to wonder what Lillian wants from him throughout part II.

The connection between the conflicts in Rearden's personal and professional lives is drawn explicitly in his conversation with Dagny after the wedding, and indeed Dagny's discussion of trade in personal relationships recalls a point that has just been made about financial trade by Francisco, at the wedding that they both attended:

Money demands of you the recognition that men must work for their own benefit, not for their own injury, for their gain, not their loss—the recognition that they are not beasts of burden, born to carry the weight of your misery—that you must offer them values, not wounds—that the common bond among men is not the exchange of suffering, but the exchange of *goods*. (411)

The quote comes from the novel's first great philosophical speech: Francisco's hymn to the meaning of money (410–15). In it, Francisco gives an abstract statement of the central

philosophical principle that has been dramatized by the novel up to this point: *moral virtue*—rationality in particular—is the source of wealth (and, therefore, of survival) and is required to maintain and enjoy it.<sup>17</sup> The speech and Francisco’s subsequent conversation with Rearden is a turning point in the novel. The two had met before, but this encounter marks the beginning of their friendship and of Francisco’s role as Rearden’s teacher. Their first meeting was at the Reardens’ anniversary party—an occasion at which all the guests were united in their scorn for Rearden and their support for a piece of legislation (the Equalization of Opportunity Bill) that would soon “slash away part of his life” (214). Francisco offered Rearden gratitude, pointing out that none of the other guests would; and he asked why Rearden was willing to support them. Rearden’s unhappiness, he suggested, was evidence of a battle in which these people were using a “terrible weapon” against him (147–48). At the time Rearden damns Francisco, but at Taggart’s wedding, he recalls the offer:

When I met you, do you remember that you said you wanted to offer me your gratitude? . . . I told you that I didn’t need it and I insulted you for it. All right, you’ve won. That speech you’ve made tonight—that was what you were offering me, wasn’t it? . . . It was more than gratitude, and I needed the gratitude; it was more than admiration, and I needed that too; it was much more than any word I can find, it will take me days to think of all that it’s given me—but one thing I do know: I needed it. (417)

Months later, Francisco explains to Rearden what he gave him in that speech and why Rearden needed it. We will come to this in due course; for the present let’s turn to Francisco’s first lesson: “There are no evil thoughts except one, the refusal to think” (418). He explains that Rearden is making the same error, though “in a nobler form,” as a woman who dismissed Francisco’s speech because she didn’t *feel* that it was true (415). Both are “refusing to recognize reality,” though for opposite reasons. The woman, and those like her, “keep evading thoughts that they know to be good . . . because they want to avoid effort.”

You keep pushing out of your mind thoughts which you believe to be evil . . . because you won’t permit yourself to consider anything that would spare you. They indulge their emotions at any cost. You sacrifice your emotions as the first cost of any problem. They are willing to bear nothing. You are willing to bear anything. They keep evading responsibility, you keep assuming it. But don’t you see that the essential error is the same? (418)

Thus, Francisco counsels Rearden to examine his desires rather than sacrificing them.

We have seen already how Rearden sacrifices his desires in connection with his marriage and his passion for Dagny. His attendance at the wedding is an example of this; amongst his reasons for consenting to Lillian’s demand was that “he heard the pleading cry in his mind: ‘Oh God, Lillian, anything but that party!’ and he did not allow himself to beg for mercy” (386). Later that evening, reflecting on the pain he (mistakenly) thinks he has inflicted on Dagny, he says of his own pain, “I wish it were worse,” and adds, “At least I’m not letting myself get away with it” (425). When, as a response to these and similar statements, Dagny points out to Rearden that his “only real guilt” is that he’s “always rejected [his] own pleasure too easily” and “been willing to bear too much,” Rearden recognizes this as the same point Francisco made earlier in the evening (427). But, as Rearden points out, he and Francisco were “talking about quite a different subject”: in connection with his professional life also, Rearden has been sacrificing his

desires and suppressing thoughts that might alleviate his burdens. Consider how he reacted to the news of Ellis Wyatt's disappearance:

He tried to avoid these thoughts [that the world is devolving into a Dark Age and that his struggle against it is hopeless]. He had to stand on guard against his own feeling—as if some part of him had become a stranger that had to be kept numb, and his will had to be its constant, watchful anesthetic. That part was an unknown of which he knew only that he must never see its root and never give it voice. He had lived through one dangerous moment which he could not allow to return.

It was the moment when—alone in his office, on a winter evening, held paralyzed by a newspaper spread on his desk with a long column of directives on the front page—he had heard on the radio the news of Ellis Wyatt's flaming oil fields. Then, his first reaction—before any thought of the future, any sense of disaster, any shock, terror or protest—had been to burst out laughing. He had laughed in triumph, in deliverance, in a spurting, living exultation—and the words which he had not pronounced, but felt, were: God bless you, Ellis, whatever you're doing!

When he had grasped the implications of his laughter, he had known that he was now condemned to constant vigilance against himself. Like the survivor of a heart attack, he knew that he had had a warning and that he carried within him a danger that could strike him at any moment. (363)

Rearden bursts into triumphant laughter again at the wedding when Francisco precipitates a run on d'Anconia Copper stock thus ruining many of the looters who profited from the regulations crippling Rearden's mills. Though Rearden suppresses the feeling and repeats his earlier condemnation of Francisco, later that evening he admits that he is "certain of nothing about him—except that I like him" (427), and he agrees with Dagny's assessment that he has "fallen for" Francisco. He now faces directly his thoughts about the state of the world and about what Dagny and Francisco mean to him:

all that's left for us ahead is to keep the ship afloat as long as we can and then go down with it. . . . I look at people and they seem to be made of nothing but pain. He's not. You're not. That terrible hopelessness that's all around us, I lose it only in his presence and here. Nowhere else. (428)

And, as Rearden acknowledges that he cannot damn Francisco, he acknowledges too that he cannot damn himself and Dagny for their relationship: "the things I said to you that morning in Ellis Wyatt's house . . . I think I was lying to myself" (428).

On the night of Taggart's wedding, then, Rearden hears a moral defense of trade that explains how proper human relationships are based on mutual advantage; he recognizes that his relationship with Dagny is of this nature, whereas his relationship with Lillian is not; he grasps that he has been suppressing as evil thoughts that would alleviate his suffering; and he faces some of these thoughts directly. All of this sets the context for his reaction the following morning when Lillian discovers his adultery.

Lillian's response is revolting. She seems to delight in Rearden's hypocrisy, likening him, "the man who wanted to hold himself as perfect," to Icarus, who "wanted to reach the sun on wings made of wax"; and the punishment she proposes for him targets his "vaunted self-esteem":

I want you to face, in your own home, the one person who despises you and has the right to do so. I want you to look at me whenever you build another furnace, or pour another recordbreaking load of steel, or hear applause and admiration, whenever you feel proud of yourself, whenever you feel clean, whenever you feel drunk on the sense of your own greatness. I want you to look at me whenever you hear of some act of depravity, or feel anger at human corruption, or feel contempt for someone's knavery, or are the victim of a new governmental extortion—to look and to know that you're no better, that you're superior to no one, that there's nothing you have the right to condemn. (431)

Rearden feels “so overwhelming a tide of revulsion that it swamped Lillian out of human form,” but he can account for her ugliness only as an attempt to hide the pain of a betrayed lover, and though he despises Lillian and no longer condemns his passion for Dagny, he does still feel responsible for breaking his marriage vows and hurting Lillian, so he accedes to her wishes. Nevertheless, as Lillian passes sentence on him, he has “the thought that there was some flaw in the scheme of the punishment she wanted him to bear, something wrong by its own terms, aside from its propriety or justice, some practical miscalculation that would demolish it all if discovered” (431).

In the next scene, Rearden, who is now on the premise of noticing parallels between the problems in his personal and professional lives, discovers this same flaw in Floyd Ferris' attempt to pressure him into selling Rearden Metal to the State Science Institute. When Ferris threatens to arrest him for the sale of Rearden Metal to Ken Danagger, Rearden names the act as blackmail, but notes “a peculiar difference between the manner of a plain blackmailer and that of Dr. Ferris.” Whereas the former would “show signs of gloating over his victim's sin” and convey a sense of danger to both parties, Ferris' “manner was that of dealing with the normal and the natural, it suggested a sense of safety, it held no tone of condemnation, but a hint of comradeship, a comradeship based—for both of them—on self-contempt” (435).

This had been true of Lillian's manner as well. Seized by a feeling of eager attentiveness, Rearden feels that “he is about to discover another step along his half-glimpsed trail,” and he points out that Ferris seems “pleased” that Rearden had broken one of his laws. When Ferris explains that the laws are made to be broken, so that power-lusting bureaucrats can “cash in on the guilt,” Rearden's face takes on the “look of luminous serenity that comes from the sudden answer to an old dark problem.” He explains: “There is a flaw in your system, Dr. Ferris, a practical flaw which you will discover when you put me on trial for selling four thousand tons of Rearden Metal to Ken Danagger” (437). Though we are not told this until later, what Rearden realizes is that his trial depends on the pretense, which requires his complicity, that the laws on which he will be tried are legitimate and that his action is a crime. Something analogous is true for Lillian's scheme of punishment, but before Rearden can be in a position to articulate it, there is a crucial lesson that he must learn.

He learns it from his “young teacher,” who visits his office two days after his indictment. Francisco has come to make the argument that the strikers use to recruit new members—the argument that we hear in a more complete form from Galt in part III—and he gets a considerable distance into it. The crucial points, and the ones that have the biggest impact on Rearden, are that *morality is man's motive power* and that there are *two opposite moral codes*, one of which makes life possible. Francisco explains that Rearden is “one of the last moral men left to the world,” and his morality consists in the manner in which he runs his mills, where every detail is ruthlessly selected so as to be best for his purpose, which is his standard of value. If he has been

made to suffer rather than being rewarded for this achievement, it is because he has not exercised this same selectivity when dealing with people.

You take pride in setting no limit to your endurance, Mr. Rearden, because you think that you are doing right. What if you aren't? What if you're placing your virtue in the service of evil and letting it become a tool for the destruction of everything you love, respect and admire? Why don't you uphold your own code of values among men as you do among iron smelters? You who won't allow one per cent of impurity into an alloy of metal—what have you allowed into your moral code? (453–54)

Rearden had already grasped that the looters needed something from him. Now he begins to see what it is. As Francisco speaks, he hears in his mind, “like the beat of steps down the trail he had been seeking,” the words “the sanction of the victim.” Francisco goes on to deliver two of the most important paragraphs in the novel, which answer the questions he raised for Rearden in their previous encounters:

You, who would not submit to the hardships of nature, but set out to conquer it and placed it in the service of your joy and your comfort—to what have you submitted at the hands of men? You, who know from your work that one bears punishment only for being wrong—what have you been willing to bear and for what reason? All your life, you have heard yourself denounced, not for your faults, but for your greatest virtues. You have been hated, not for your mistakes, but for your achievements. You have been scorned for all those qualities of character which are your highest pride. You have been called selfish for the courage of acting on your own judgment and bearing sole responsibility for your own life. You have been called arrogant for your independent mind. You have been called cruel for your unyielding integrity. You have been called antisocial for the vision that made you venture upon undiscovered roads. You have been called ruthless for the strength and self-discipline of your drive to your purpose. You have been called greedy for the magnificence of your power to create wealth. You, who've expended an inconceivable flow of energy, have been called a parasite. You, who've created abundance where there had been nothing but wastelands and helpless, starving men before you, have been called a robber. You, who've kept them all alive, have been called an exploiter. You, the purest and most moral man among them, have been sneered at as a “vulgar materialist.” Have you stopped to ask them: by what right?—by what code?—by what standard? No, you have borne it all and kept silent. You bowed to their code and you never upheld your own. You knew what exacting morality was needed to produce a single metal nail, but you let them brand you as immoral. 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. You left the deadliest weapon in the hands of your enemies, a weapon you never suspected or understood. Their moral code is their weapon. Ask yourself how deeply and in how many terrible ways you have accepted it. Ask yourself what it is that a code of moral values does to a man's life, and why he can't exist without it, and what happens to him if he accepts the wrong standard, by which the evil is the good. Shall I tell you why

you're drawn to me, even though you think you ought to damn me? It's because I'm the first man who has given you what the whole world owes you and what you should have demanded of all men before you dealt with them: a moral sanction.

You're guilty of a great sin, Mr. Rearden, much guiltier than they tell you, but not in the way they preach. The worst guilt is to accept an undeserved guilt—and that is what you have been doing all your life. You have been paying blackmail, not for your vices, but for your virtues. 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. But your virtues were those which keep men alive. Your own moral code—the one you lived by, but never stated, acknowledged or defended—was the code that preserves man's existence. If you were punished for it, what was the nature of those who punished you? Yours was the code of life. What, then, is theirs? What standard of value lies at its root? What is its ultimate purpose? Do you think that what you're facing is merely a conspiracy to seize your wealth? You, who know the source of wealth, should know it's much more and much worse than that. Did you ask me to name man's motive power? Man's motive power is his moral code. Ask yourself where their code is leading you and what it offers you as your final goal. A viler evil than to murder a man, is to sell him suicide as an act of virtue. A viler evil than to throw a man into a sacrificial furnace, is to demand that he leap in, of his own will, and that he build the furnace, besides. By their own statement, it is *they* who need you and have nothing to offer you in return. By their own statement, you must support them because they cannot survive without you. Consider the obscenity of offering their impotence and their need—their need of *you*—as a justification for your torture. Are you willing to accept it? Do you care to purchase—at the price of your great endurance, at the price of your agony—the satisfaction of the needs of your own destroyers? (454–55)

Rearden had been unable to explain what Francisco gave him in his speech at Taggart's wedding and what it was that the looters needed from him and Dagny. Now he knows: it is a moral sanction. Francisco had told him at their first meeting that his unhappiness was evidence that a horrible weapon was being used against him, and that he was wrong to “permit anyone to call [his attitude toward his work] evil” (147). Now Rearden can see why. The weapon is a moral code antithetical to the one by which he lives. His code—his virtues—is the one that makes life possible and is the source of all efficacy. The looters need his acceptance of their code in order to give it power, and he grants this acceptance when he permits himself to be branded as evil.

Francisco's words echo through his mind at Thanksgiving dinner as his family damns him and Lillian tries to manipulate him through a guilt that he no longer feels. He can now name “the flaw in her scheme of punishment”:

She wanted to force upon him the suffering of dishonor—but his own sense of honor was her only weapon of enforcement. She wanted to wrest from him an acknowledgment of his moral depravity—but only his own moral rectitude could attach significance to such a verdict. She wanted to injure him by her contempt—but he could not be injured, unless he respected her judgment. She wanted to punish him for the pain he had caused her and she held her pain as a gun aimed at

him, as if she wished to extort his agony at the point of his pity. But her only tool was his own benevolence, his concern for her, his compassion. Her only power was the power of his own virtues. What if he chose to withdraw it?

An issue of guilt, he thought, had to rest on his own acceptance of the code of justice that pronounced him guilty. He did not accept it; he never had. His virtues, all the virtues she needed to achieve his punishment, came from another code and lived by another standard. He felt no guilt, no shame, no regret, no dishonor. He felt no concern for any verdict she chose to pass upon him: he had lost respect for her judgment long ago. And the sole chain still holding him was only a last remnant of pity.

But what was the code on which she acted? What sort of code permitted the concept of a punishment that required the victim's own virtue as the fuel to make it work? A code—he thought—which would destroy only those who tried to observe it; a punishment, from which only the honest would suffer, while the dishonest would escape unhurt. Could one conceive of an infamy lower than to equate virtue with pain, to make virtue, not vice, the source and motive power of suffering? If he were the kind of rotter she was struggling to make him believe he was, then no issue of his honor and his moral worth would matter to him. If he wasn't then what was the nature of her attempt?

To count upon his virtue and use it as an instrument of torture, to practice blackmail with the victim's generosity as sole means of extortion, to accept the gift of a man's good will and turn it into a tool for the giver's destruction . . . he sat very still, contemplating the formula of so monstrous an evil that he was able to name it, but not to believe it possible. (464–65)

Though he too generously concludes that Lillian does not understand what she is doing, he knows that he has “discovered a secret much greater than the problem of his marriage, that he had grasped the formula of a policy practiced more widely throughout the world than he dared to contemplate at the moment” (466), and he immediately acts on this knowledge. When Lillian says that the government targets him because he's been difficult to deal with, he responds that he's been too easy. When his mother tries to manipulate him into backing down on the grounds of the disgrace his trial will bring to the family, he responds that he doesn't “know or care” what it will do to them. When his brother, Philip, speaking “with the assurance of a man who knows that the moral ground of his stand is not open to question,” declares that he is guilty and his actions contemptible, Rearden recalls Francisco's questions, “By what right?—by what code?—by what standard?” and announces that he will throw Philip out on the street if he ever expresses such opinions again. His family is immediately deflated. Philip has gone too far, his mother pleads, but Rearden shouldn't be hard on him: it would prey on his conscience; he has to be kind and to have pity; and he wouldn't want to be thought selfish. When Rearden responds that it wouldn't prey on his conscience, that he isn't kind, has no pity, and is selfish, she has nothing further to say. Whereas “his consideration for them” over the years “had brought him nothing but their maliciously righteous reproaches,” they are now unable to “throw at him all those accusations of cruelty and selfishness, which he had come to accept as the eternal chorus to his life.” It was his sanction—his acceptance of their standards as legitimate—that had permitted it (467–70).

The following day he takes the same approach at his trial, where he refuses to help disguise the nature of the proceeding and denies the legitimacy of the court and of the laws on which he is being tried.

*That is the flaw in your theory, gentlemen, and I will not help you out of it. If you choose to deal with men by means of compulsion, do so. But you will discover that you need the voluntary co-operation of your victims, in many more ways than you can see at present. And your victims should discover that it is their own volition—which you cannot force—that makes you possible. I choose to be consistent and I will obey you in the manner you demand. Whatever you wish me to do, I will do it at the point of a gun. If you sentence me to jail, you will have to send armed men to carry me there—I will not volunteer to move. If you fine me, you will have to seize my property to collect the fine—I will not volunteer to pay it. If you believe that you have the right to force me—use your guns openly. I will not help you to disguise the nature of your action. (479)*

In response to the judges' questions, as to those of his mother, he adheres ruthlessly to his moral code, and repeatedly rejects their attempts to intimidate him into making concessions to theirs. When the eldest judge, for example, says that he wouldn't want to be "misunderstood" and "give support to the widespread impression" that he is "a man devoid of social conscience" who "works for nothing but his own profit," Rearden affirms that this impression is correct and speaks eloquently about the virtue of selfishness. After this, when the judge, no longer in a posture of authority, tries to cast all the blame for the illegal sale on Danagger (who has since vanished), Rearden insists that it was made by "equal, mutual, voluntary agreement"; and, when another judge tries to justify the action on the grounds that Rearden "was prompted to disregard the legal technicalities by the critical situation of the coal mines and crucial importance of fuel to the public welfare," Rearden responds that he was prompted only by his own profit and interests (482). As a result, Rearden is given only a small fine, which is suspended, and the audience applauds him.

The actions Rearden takes on Thanksgiving and at his trial are made possible by what he has learned, and this knowledge is the result—for Rearden and for the reader—of reflection on events earlier in the novel. Though some of the key principles are articulated by Francisco, they are only convincing because of the evidence provided by these earlier events. And indeed, during the crucial discussion in Rearden's office, Francisco makes continual reference to the consequences of Rearden's creation of his Metal and to the results of its use on the John Galt Line.

The actions Rearden takes based on his new-found knowledge confirms it, raises new questions, and forms a basis for further conclusions. Looking at the judges who folded so easily, Rearden contemplates "with a bitter wonder that was almost fear . . . the enormity of the smallness of the enemy who was destroying the world," and he recognizes that if men such as himself were defeated by such an enemy, it can only be through their own fault. Such an impotent evil can only triumph when good men are "willing to let the brand of evil be stamped upon us and silently to bear punishment for our virtues" (483). This observation gives rise to a question: In what ways that they do not yet realize are Rearden and Dagny still giving their moral sanction to evil? Francisco poses this question to Rearden by suggesting that he read a transcript of the speech he made at his trial and consider whether he "is practicing it consistently—or not" (487).



The results of the trial give rise to another question as well. Looking over the crowd, Rearden observes that “they had cheered him today” as he had been cheered during the first run of the John Galt Line, but that these same people would “clamor” for more of the statist measures that shackled him and that were driving the country to ruin, “because they would be told to forget, as a sin, that which had made them cheer Hank Rearden.”

Why were they ready to renounce their highest moments as a sin? Why were they willing to betray the best within them? What made them believe that this earth was a realm of evil where despair was their natural fate? He could not name the reason, but he knew that it had to be named. He felt it as a huge question mark within the courtroom, which it was now his duty to answer.

This was the real sentence imposed upon him, he thought—to discover what idea, what simple idea available to the simplest man, had made mankind accept the doctrines that led it to self-destruction. (483–84)

Over the course of the next six months Rearden will identify this “simple idea”—“the worst of our enemies’ creed”—as “the one tenet by which they destroy a man before he’s started, the killer-tenet: the breach between his mind and body” (857–58).<sup>18</sup> We have already seen that it is because of this dichotomy that Rearden initially damns himself and Dagny for their affair, and we have seen how he comes by degrees to recognize that there is something wrong in the traditional views of sex and pleasure and how he admits that, in his initial condemnation of the affair, he was “lying to himself.” By the time of his trial, he no longer regards his feeling for Dagny as evil and even takes a sort of pride in it and in his newfound enjoyment of sensuous pleasures. He has not, however, identified the nature or moral character of this enjoyment. In short, at the time of his trial, Rearden’s attitude toward sex is equivalent to his attitude toward his work earlier in the novel: he loves it unreservedly, but without an understanding of its nature or the conviction that he is morally right to do so.

As Francisco’s speeches at Taggart’s wedding and in Rearden’s office help Rearden to understand the meaning of money and the moral nature of his work, so Francisco’s speech on “The Meaning of Sex” (486–93), shortly after Rearden’s trial, gives him the words he needs to understand the cause and moral significance of his passion for Dagny and to identify for the first time the error he made in damning sex. Francisco identifies the mind-body dichotomy explicitly and explains how both promiscuity and Platonic love are variants of the same error made by the people who denounce wealth.

We can see the consequences of this new knowledge in Rearden’s next encounter with Lillian, when she learns the identity of his mistress. Rearden does not show any sign of guilt, as he did when Lillian first discovered that he was having an affair. In the earlier scene, he acknowledged to Lillian that she had “the right to condemn me in any way you wish” and “to decide what you wish me to do” (430). Though he said that he would not comply with a demand that he give up the affair, he acknowledged that she had the right to make such a demand. However, in the present scene, when Lillian asserts this right, he responds that “no human being can hold on another a claim demanding that he wipe himself out of existence,” and he tells her that he would continue his affair with Dagny “even if it took your life” (529). Moreover, when Lillian damns Dagny for her sexuality, just as Rearden himself had “in the sun-striped bedroom of Ellis Wyatt’s house,” he fully appreciates the moral difference between the two women’s attitudes toward sex and sees “the obscenity of letting impotence hold itself as virtue and damn the power of living as a sin”: “he saw, with the clarity of direct perception, in the shock of a

single instant, the terrible ugliness of that which had once been his own belief” (530). When Lillian leaves he feels a wondrous sense of freedom and deliverance in “the shining, guiltless knowledge” that it “did not matter” and “did not have to matter” “what Lillian felt, what she discovered, or what became of her” (531).

Rearden could not have achieved this deliverance prior to coming to understand the meaning of sex, nor could he have appreciated Francisco’s speech on this topic prior either to his relationship with Dagny or to his coming to understand the morality of the principles on which he conducts his business and the relation of these principles to his private life. However, he has not yet reached the end of his trail. Though he no longer feels guilty for his passion for Dagny and he finds Lillian despicable, he still believes that Lillian is motivated by some incomprehensible form of love for him, and he feels responsible for breaking his word to her. Because of this, he is willing to “atone” for his infidelity by remaining in a marriage that by his standards is “a vicious fraud”: “my standards are not yours. I do not understand yours, I never have, but I will accept them. If this is the manner of your love for me, if bearing the name of my wife will give you some form of contentment, I won’t take it away from you” (530). Furthermore, though he grasps the nature and ugliness of Lillian’s belief about sex, he does so only in the form of a “feeling, left unsealed by his mind” (530). As a consequence of this, he is unable to appreciate all the consequences of this knowledge, and its connections with what he has learned about the sanction of the victim, and so he is unable to deal existentially with Lillian. When she insults Dagny, he responds with a threat and the demand that “Neither you nor anyone else is to discuss her,” which lets Lillian know that he is susceptible to blackmail (431).

It is when Ferris uses Lillian’s discovery to blackmail him into signing the Gift Certificate for his Metal that Rearden comprehends the connection between the mind-body dichotomy, the sanction of the victim, and the opposing moral codes. Ferris’ extortion depends on the fact that Rearden is virtuous. The metal is an effect of his virtue, as is his affair with Dagny. He creates life-sustaining values because he loves them—because he loves life. This is the essence of his code, but Ferris and the other looters live by an opposite code. They extort their living from men like Rearden by holding their values hostage. Ferris, who calls Rearden’s loyalty to values “impractical,” represents a moral code that

hooks a man’s love of existence to a circuit of torture, so that only the man who had nothing to offer would have nothing to fear, so that the virtues that made life possible and the values which gave it meaning become the agents of its destruction, so that one’s best became a tool of one’s agony and man’s life on earth became impractical. (561)

Rearden has learned that the practice of such a code requires the acceptance and sanction of the victims, in myriad ways. Chief among these is the victims’ acceptance of their own virtue as guilt for which they are willing to bear punishment—“a punishment that requires the victim’s own virtue as the fuel to make it work” (561). When he asks himself what could make the victims accept this, he sees the answer:

Hadn’t he done it also? Hadn’t he given his sanction to the code of self-damnation? Dagny—he thought—and the depth of their feeling for each other . . . the blackmail from which the depraved would be immune . . . hadn’t he, too, once called it depravity? Hadn’t he been first to throw at her all the insults which the

human scum was now threatening to throw at her in public? Hadn't he accepted as guilt the highest happiness he had ever found? (561)

And he recalls Francisco's question: "You, who won't allow one percent impurity into an alloy of metal, what have you allowed into your moral code?" In that same conversation Francisco told Rearden that he was guilty of the great sin of accepting an unearned guilt and paying blackmail to the impotent for the virtues that kept men alive (455). Rearden grasps now for the first time how he was guilty of "damning as guilt that which was my best":

I broke their code, but I fell into the trap they intended, the trap of a code devised to be broken. I took no pride in my rebellion, I took it as guilt, I did not damn them, I damned myself, I did not damn their code, I damned existence—and I hid my happiness as a shameful secret. . . .

I did it—in the name of pity for the most contemptible woman I know. That, too, was their code, and I accepted it. I believed that one person owes a duty to another with no payment for it in return. . . . I believed that love is some static gift which, once granted, need no longer be deserved—just as they believe that wealth is a static possession which can be seized and held without further effort. . . . I placed pity above my own conscience, and *this* is the core of my guilt. My crime was committed when I said to her, "By every standard of mine, to maintain our marriage will be a vicious fraud. But my standards are not yours. I do not understand yours, I never have, but I will accept them."

Here they are, lying on my desk, those standards I accepted without understanding, here is the manner of her love for me, that love which I never believed, but tried to spare. . . .

It was not the cheap little looters of wealth who have beaten me—it was I. They did not disarm me—I threw away my weapon. This is a battle that cannot be fought except with clean hands—because the enemy's sole power is in the sores of one's conscience—and I accepted a code that made me regard the strength of my hands as a sin and a stain. (564–65)

At their first meeting, Francisco told Rearden that the impotent guests who damned him while eating his food and surviving by dint of his productive genius, were using a "terrible weapon" against him. Rearden now grasps for the first time how this is the case. As he later explains to Dagny, "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." As a result, he "accepted punishment for it . . . at the hands of an arrogant evil, made arrogant solely by my ignorance and my submission" (858).

In that first encounter Francisco described Rearden as working for his enemies, and now Rearden can see that he was correct. Since it is morality that determines one's purposes, in conceding the realm of morality to his enemies, Rearden delivered his ability into their hands.

I, who knew that wealth is only a means to an end, created the means and let them prescribe my 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.

I had cut myself in two, as the mystics preached, and I ran my business by one code of rules, but my own life by another. I rebelled against the looter's attempt to set the price and value of my steel—but I let them set the moral values of my life. I rebelled against demands for an unearned wealth—but I thought it was my duty to grant an unearned love to a wife I despised, an unearned respect to a mother who hated me, an unearned support to a brother who plotted for my destruction. I rebelled against undeserved financial injury—but I accepted a life of undeserved pain. I rebelled against the doctrine that my productive ability was guilt—but I accepted, as guilt, my capacity for happiness. I rebelled against the creed that virtue is some disembodied unknowable of the spirit—but I damned you, *you*, my dearest one, for the desire of your body and mine. But if the body is evil, then so are those who provide the means of its survival, so is material wealth and those who produce it—and if moral values are set in contradiction to our physical existence, then it's right that rewards should be unearned, that virtue should consist of the undone, that there should be no tie between achievement and profit, that the inferior animals who're able to produce should serve those superior beings whose superiority in spirit consists of incompetence in the flesh. (858–59)

Rearden's liberation from guilt—the progression we have been following—is a *philosophical* development, which consists in drawing abstract and evaluative conclusions from his observations of the world and integrating them into more and more abstract principles—of checking progressively deeper and more abstract premises about the way in which he and others live, when he finds that these premises contradict one another or his experience. Thus, though at the beginning of the novel, if “some man like Hugh Akston” told him that there was a connection between his view of sex and his economic exploitation, he would have “laughed in his face,” by the beginning of part III he has grasped the connection. His mills have come to be “ruled by human scum,” he sees “the achievement of my life serving to enrich the worst of my enemies,” and he understands *why* this is the case (859).

He has not yet reached Atlantis, however: rather than a sense of radiant joy, “He felt nothing—nothing but the sense of an even restful twilight like a spread of slag over a molten metal, when it crusts and swallows the last brilliant spurt of the white glow within” (571). He is not ready to go on strike; his acceptance of the mind-body dichotomy was not the only chain holding Rearden to the looters' world. Like Dagny, who never accepted the dichotomy and “was completely incapable of experiencing a feeling of fundamental guilt” (87), he will not be able to break with the looters wholly and achieve happiness until he understands their basic motivation and just how his sanction has enabled them. In the final section of this paper I will trace the final steps that lead to this understanding. I turn now to the earlier stages of Dagny's progression.

## DAGNY'S DESPERATE QUEST

The immediate context for Dagny's development across parts II and III of *Atlas Shrugged* is the paradox of the John Galt Line—her greatest achievement, which has served to undermine the very values for the sake of which she created it. But this paradox is only the most dramatic case of a contradiction that Dagny has faced her whole life. She tells Galt that she started her life with “a single absolute: that the world was mine to shape in the image of my highest values and never to be given up to a lesser standard, no matter how long or hard the struggle” (812). Dagny knows

that her values are rational, and therefore that they can be achieved and are not to be given up. But though she takes all the actions required to achieve them, they inexplicably remain forever beyond her reach. This contradiction intensifies over the course of part II, and in the valley is resolved into a single question, which is her last premise left to check when she returns to the world in part III (807).

We can see this paradox from her childhood onward. At nine years old, bored with the people around her and having “caught a glimpse of another world . . . that created trains, bridges, telegraph wires, and signal lights winking in the night,” she decides that she will grow up into that world and run Taggart Transcontinental. In pursuit of this goal, she hangs “around the tracks and the roundhouses like a humble student” with “a hint of future pride” (51). At the age of sixteen, as she begins her first job on the railroad and prepares for her first ball, she thinks that she has “entered her kind of world,” but she soon learns that she has not (51).

The world she seeks is the “luminously rational” one of science and mathematics, a world where one can feel the “joy of admiration and of one’s own ability growing together” and where one is tried against worthy adversaries (50). It is a world in which she will meet the man who she imagines beyond the horizon holding the railroad tracks in his hand at the point where they converge—the man who represents the sort of ability that creates railroads (220). By contrast, at the ball she meets only “helpless young men” for whom she feels contempt (104). And, in her first few years at Taggart Transcontinental, she finds herself “screaming silently, at times, for a glimpse of human ability, a single glimpse of clean, hard, radiant competence” and has “fits of tortured longing for a friend or an enemy with a mind better than her own.” The adversary she is “forced to fight” is “not worth matching or beating”: rather than “a superior ability which she would have found honor in challenging,” it is “ineptitude—a gray spread of cotton that seemed soft and shapeless, that could offer no resistance to anything or anybody, yet managed to be a barrier in her way. She stood, disarmed, before the riddle of what made this possible. She could find no answer” (52). Later, as Vice-President in Charge of Operation, when walking through Manhattan surrounded by buildings that “rise to such heights that her glance [cannot] find the sky,” she thinks, “It has taken so much to build this city, it should have so much to offer” (66). But she can find little to admire and nothing to inspire her. Her work consists in fighting incompetence and arguing with cowards who cry despairingly: “Who is John Galt?”

The railroad is her highest value, and in order to preserve it, she must complete the Rio Norte Line. When, as the result of a series of senseless evils, it becomes impossible for her to do this except by taking a leave of absence and forming an independent company, she names the company “John Galt, Inc.” in defiance of the idea represented by the question invoking that name—the idea that one’s highest values are “unattainable” (201). But consider what she then feels, sitting in her new office “on the ground floor of a half-collapsed structure”:

She knew she was alone in the ruins of a building. It seemed as if she were alone in the city. She felt an emotion held back for years: a loneliness much beyond this moment, beyond the silence of the room and the wet, glistening emptiness of the street; the loneliness of a gray wasteland where nothing was worth reaching; the loneliness of her childhood.

She rose and walked to the window. By pressing her face to the pane, she could see the whole of the Taggart Building, its lines converging abruptly to its distant pinnacle in the sky. She looked up at the dark window of the room that had been her office. She felt as if she were in exile, never to return, as if she were

separated from the building by much more than a sheet of glass, a curtain of rain and the span of a few months.

She stood, in a room of crumbling plaster, pressed to the windowpane, looking up at the unattainable form of everything she loved. She did not know the nature of her loneliness. The only words that named it were: This is not the world I expected. (219–20)

Dagny does not doubt that she will succeed in completing the Line or saving the Railroad or that she will resume her position as Vice-President. It is not these concretes that she sees as unattainable, but her world—the world the railroad represents. “She would never find it. Her own thought of what life could be like, was all she would ever have of the world she had wanted. Only the thought of it—and a few rare moments, like a few lights reflected from it on her way—to know, to hold, to follow to the end” (220). Here we see Dagny’s contradiction. She is building the John Galt Line in defiance of the premise that one’s highest values cannot be attained—a premise which is the antithesis of the single conviction that is central to her character. And yet, she herself feels that her ideal—her world—is unattainable.

The contradiction seems to be resolved during the first run of the John Galt Line and in its immediate aftermath. Dagny has achieved her values, she is in her world. She disembarks the train into the company of the Colorado industrialists who are the bondholders of John Galt, Inc., all men she admires. Moreover, her triumph has brought out the most admirable traits in all the people around her: all of the Taggart engineers volunteer for the run (232); the crew performs excellently, enjoying their competence; the crowds are enthusiastic and even the reporters shed their cynicism (238); “sons of Taggart employees” and “old railroad men” assemble into an honor guard (242); people gather on hills and at porches and windows to watch the train pass, greeting it with flowers and fireworks (243). This is Dagny’s world—a benevolent universe in which ambitious values can be achieved and such achievements unite men in good will.<sup>19</sup> That evening she fully expects that after a year of running trains on the Line, she will be able to rebuild the whole Taggart system and “offer three-day freight service across the continent, on a Rearden Metal Track from ocean to ocean!” (250), and waking up the next morning beside Rearden, she likens the pattern of sunlight and shadow cast by the Venetian blinds to

the cracks of a wall which the John Galt Line had broken, the advance notice of what awaited them outside—she thought of the trip back, on the new rail, with the first train from Wyatt Junction—the trip back to her office in the Taggart Building and to all the things now open for her to win. (254)

It is not long, however, before her achievement is threatened by a new variant of the “gray spread of cotton” that has always inexplicably managed to bar her way:

this was a fog without shapes or definitions, in which something kept forming and shifting before it could be seen, like semi-clots in a not-quite-liquid—it was as if her eyes were reduced to side-vision and she were sensing blurs of disaster coiling toward her, but she could not move her glance, she had no glance to move and focus. (299)

Back in Colorado four months after the first run, Dagny looks “for a moment’s relief in the sight of a victorious achievement” at a train about to start down the track of the Line. Noticing how the passengers now take the Line for granted, she thinks “We’ve done it—this much, at least, is

done” (333). But, she is wrong. Moments later she learns that the blurs of disaster have coiled into a set of directives issued by Wesley Mouch nullifying her achievement. The number and speed of trains on the Line is severely restricted and railroad bonds are frozen.

[T]here would be no trains and no life-blood of freight, the John Galt Line had been only a drainpipe that had permitted Jim Taggart to make a deal and to drain [the Colorado industrialists’] wealth, unearned, into his pocket, in exchange for letting others drain his railroad—the bonds of the John Galt Line, which, this morning, had been the proud guardians of their owners’ security and future, had become in the space of an hour, scraps of paper that no one would buy, with no value, no future, no power, save the power to close the doors and stop the wheels of the last hope of the country—and Taggart Transcontinental was not a living plant, fed by blood it had worked to produce, but a cannibal of the moment, devouring the unborn children of greatness. (335)

Ellis Wyatt, who was the prime mover of the Colorado boom on which Dagny counted to save the railroad and the country, sets fire to his oil wells and disappears.

Part II of the novel picks up six months later, by which time Dagny’s job consists in canceling trains to dying Colorado towns and struggling against senseless regulations to maintain some sort of service in the few remaining productive areas (351). Instead of the “brilliant pride” she used to feel at the sight of Taggart rail, she now feels “a foggy, guilty shame, as if some foul kind of rust had grown on the metal, and worse: as if the rust had a tinge of blood.” The rail remains a superlative achievement that she loves and will not “surrender to the men of blood and rust,” but the nature of her work and her attitude toward it is now fundamentally different (352).

In part I, Dagny had a plan to save the railroad; there was an ambitious positive value she was pursuing; but with Colorado dying, she no longer sees any way forward. As part II progresses, it seems increasingly inevitable that industrial civilization will vanish from the face of the earth—a prospect that has been made all too vivid by her experience in Starnesville (282–86). Her work is a war of attrition in which she tries to delay this outcome—to hold out a little longer. In doing so she is sometimes motivated by a hope that political conditions will improve, making it possible to rebuild (645). More often, however, she goes on out of dedication to a cause she believes is lost (632). Throughout, she lacks any positive long-range goal. “I have stopped thinking of a future, or of a railroad system,” she says at the meeting at which the Board of Taggart Transcontinental decides to close the John Galt Line, “I intend to continue running trains so long as it is still possible to run them. I don’t think that it will be much longer” (509).

“The only goal in sight that gave meaning to her struggle”—“the only part of her work that made her able to bear the rest”—is her inquiry concerning the motor, that she and Rearden discovered in the abandoned factory of the Twentieth Century Motor Company (352, cf. 381). Initially she wants to rebuild the motor as a means of running trains on a reinvigorated Taggart Transcontinental, but already by the beginning of part II there is little hope of this, and it becomes increasingly clear that the motor is needed “not to move trains, but to keep her moving” (672). The motor and the man who made it supplant Taggart Transcontinental as Dagny’s emblem of human achievement and of the world she wants.

As a result, her inquiry concerning the motor becomes disconnected from her job, and sometimes conflicts with it (300, 688–89). Thus, in part II, the values that give meaning to Dagny’s life are detached from her work, which is increasingly a senseless burden. In part I, when she was still pursuing a plan to rebuild the system, she could take pleasure and pride in her

work, despite the loathing she sometimes felt for the gray cotton that was her adversary. By the beginning of part II, however, “The only pride of her workday was not that it had been lived, but that it had been survived. It was wrong, she thought, it was viciously wrong that one should ever be forced to say that about any hour of one’s life.” (367)

“Stretched in an armchair of her living room” after a particularly senseless and ugly workday, her thoughts turn from this topic to Rearden and his development over the course of their relationship. Reflecting on both his efficacy and his capacity for enjoyment, Dagny thinks of him as “a man who belong[s] on earth,” or more exactly as “a man to whom the earth belong[s]”:

Why, then—she wondered—should he have had to carry a burden of tragedy which, in silent endurance, he had accepted so completely that he had barely known he carried it? She knew part of the answer; she felt as if the whole answer were close and she would grasp it on some approaching day. (370)

The part of the answer that Dagny knows is that Rearden has accepted the false dichotomy between spirit and body. She has always rejected it, and during the first run of the John Galt Line she found the words to formulate her premise that the mind and body are a unity and grasped how this premise lies behind her conviction that one can and must bring one’s highest values into reality (240–41).<sup>20</sup>

Rearden, like Dagny, has always taken pride in achieving his values—in “shaping matter to his wishes by the power of his brain” (158). By the beginning of part III, he has come to celebrate his affair with Dagny and his newfound ability to enjoy luxury, as an expression of this same conviction:

Dagny, if some artist painted you as you are now, men would come to look at the painting to experience a moment that nothing could give them in their own lives. They would call it great art. . . . Dagny, they’d feel it and go away and sleep with the first barmaid in sight—and they’d never try to reach what they had felt. I wouldn’t want to seek it from a painting. I’d want it real. I’d take no pride in any hopeless longing. I wouldn’t hold a stillborn aspiration. I’d want to have it, to make it, to live it. Do you understand? (368)

Dagny’s emphatic response (“Oh yes, Hank, *I* understand!”) underscores the centrality to her character of rejecting “hopeless longings” and of making and *living* her values. Yet, she too is carrying a “burden of tragedy”; and, in her career at least, she is no longer living her values. Though she has achieved every concrete goal she set for herself, she has not succeeded at making *her world*: the achievements have slipped away and her professional life has been reduced to an increasingly hopeless drudgery. This suggests that she suffers from some form of the same error as does Rearden; and Dagny recognizes this herself, “as she lay in an armchair of her living room on a dismal evening of spring, waiting for him to come” and reflecting on his remark that there is a “vicious and very important error” in “what we’re taught”:

Just a little farther, my darling—she thought—look a little farther and you’ll be free of that error and of all the wasted pain you never should have had to carry. . . . But she felt that she, too, had not seen the whole of the distance, and she wondered what were the steps left for her to discover. . . . (373)



Dagny needs to discover the way in which she is the cause of her own suffering. She needs to understand why her creation of the John Galt Line led to the results it did, and more generally how her work is undermining rather than promoting her values. It is Francisco who articulates these questions for her. Consider the first exchange between them after the Line has been completed and the Colorado-destroying directives passed. When he asks, “Don’t you want to tell me what a brilliant achievement the John Galt Line turned out to be?” she accuses him of despising achievement, and he responds:

“Yes, don’t I? I despise that Line so much that I didn’t want to see it reach the kind of end it has reached.”

He saw her look of sudden attentiveness, the look of thought rushing into a breach torn open upon a new direction. He watched her for a moment, as if he knew every step she would find along that road, then chuckled and said, “Don’t you want to ask me now: Who is John Galt? . . . Don’t you remember that you dared him to come and claim your Line? Well, he has.”

He walked on, not waiting to see the look in her eyes—a look that held anger, bewilderment and the first faint gleam of a question mark. (408–9)

She now realizes that Francisco, who had predicted that John Galt would claim her Line (201), foresaw its fate from the beginning. In addition to providing an insight into Francisco’s character, which has perplexed Dagny for years, this realization implies that the fate of the Line was predictable—that it *had* to end as it did and, therefore, that she was wrong to create it. These thoughts, not yet named in words, are the “first faint gleam of a question mark” in Dagny’s mind—her first inkling that the premises that lead her to build the Line need to be checked.

Francisco begins to challenge the premises explicitly in their next meeting. It occurs on the evening when Taggart Transcontinental’s Board of Directors, a body composed of the “gray cotton” that has always inexplicably barred Dagny’s way, votes to close the John Galt Line (509, cf. 518). Thinking of her great-grandfather Nat Taggart, who created the railroad in the face of tremendous obstacles and great pain, Dagny rededicates herself to the fight to preserve the railroad for as long as possible (510). If she let the railroad perish, she tells Francisco, she would be betraying Nat Taggart and “any man living now and capable of knowing” what he felt in his most difficult hour (514). He responds:

Dagny, the men of your Board of Directors are no match for Nat Taggart, are they? There’s no form of contest in which they could beat him, there’s nothing he’d have to fear from them, there’s no mind, no will, no power in the bunch of them to equal one-thousandth of his. . . . Then why is it that throughout man’s history the Nat Taggarts, who make the world, have always won—and always lost it to the men of the Board? . . . How could men who’re afraid to hold an unqualified opinion about the weather, fight Nat Taggart? How could they seize his achievement, if he chose to defend it? Dagny, he fought with every weapon he possessed, except the most important one. They could not have won, if we—he and the rest of us—had not given the world away to them. (514)

When Dagny responds that it is men like Francisco and the vanished industrialists who have given the world to the men of the Board, Francisco asks “Who built the John Galt Line for them?”

He saw only the faintest contraction of her mouth, but he knew that the question was like a blow across an open wound. Yet she answered quietly, "I did."

"For this kind of end?"

"For the men who did not hold out, would not fight and gave up."

"Don't you see that no other end was possible?" (514)

She answers that she does not and resolves to go on taking as "much injustice" as she is "able to fight," but now the premise on which she has been acting is explicit for the first time. *The Line could have succeeded but failed because the Colorado industrialists gave up*. They could have held out, like Dagny, struggling to remain in business and to preserve an industrial society, despite the destructive injustice of the frozen bonds and rationed trains. Had they done so, Colorado and the Line would have lasted for a little longer at least.

When she learns of Directive 10-289, Dagny does quit, because she is unwilling to "work as a slave or a slave driver" and to do so would be to betray Nat Taggart (552). However, she still does not see that the John Galt Line and her career at Taggart Transcontinental *had* to end as they did. As a result, sequestered in her cabin in Woodstock, she faces a paralyzing confusion:

There were long stretches of calm, when she was able to face her problem with the dispassionate clarity of weighing a problem in engineering. But she could find no answer. She knew that her desperate longing for the railroad would vanish, were she to convince herself that it was impossible or improper. But the longing came from the certainty that the truth and the right were hers—that the enemy was the irrational and the unreal—that she could not set herself another goal or summon the love to achieve it, while her rightful achievement had been lost, not to some superior power, but to a loathsome evil that conquered by means of impotence. (611)

But it is not true . . . that there is no place in the future for a superlative achievement of man's mind; it can never be true. No matter what her problem, this would always remain to her—this immovable conviction that evil was unnatural and temporary. She felt it more clearly than ever this morning: the certainty that the ugliness of the men in the city and the ugliness of her suffering were transient accidents—while the smiling sense of hope within her at the sight of a sun-flooded forest, the sense of an unlimited promise, was the permanent and the real. (612)

We see here, in a newly intense form, the contradiction that Dagny has faced her entire life: her values are possible and proper and the world is hers to shape in their image; and yet, incomprehensibly, they remain forever out of reach. Whatever she creates is seized, destroyed, or somehow negated by men who, in logic, should be powerless. Evil and ugliness are unnecessary, yet they are somehow pervasive and co-opt her achievements.

Earlier she had resolved to remain at her job rather than to surrender Nat Taggart's achievement to the "men of blood and rust" (352, 510, 514); now she has quit because "I couldn't let his achievement, and mine, end up with the looters as our final goal" (616). Either course of action, however, offends against the conviction that her world is achievable and not to be given up.

It seems monstrously wrong to surrender the world to the looters, and monstrously wrong to live under their rule. I can neither give up nor go back. I

can neither exist without work nor work as a serf. I had always thought that any sort of battle was proper, anything, except renunciation. I'm not sure we're right to quit, you and I, when we should have fought them. But there is no way to fight. It's surrender, if we leave—and surrender, if we remain. I don't know what is right any longer. (618)

Dagny is speaking here to Francisco who has come to recruit her to the strike, as he came to Rearden in his office, two days after his indictment. That conversation was cut short by a breakout in the mills, and Rearden's response to the emergency made it clear that he was not yet ready to be told of the strike. At the sound of the alarm both men sprang into action, as if by instinct, to avert the crisis (456–58). Rearden saw the episode as illustrating why good men will defeat the looters: “We're able to act” and “They're not” (460). And this answers the question Francisco had been about to ask him when the alarm sounded: How can you continue your work, understanding the nature of the burden you are carrying? (460). Rearden loves his ability to act and is unwilling to stand idly by while his values are threatened. In order to preserve them, he will be willing to bear any burden, no matter how unjust, until he comes to understand that his mills are not a value in the context of a society built on the looter's moral and metaphysical premises. The same applies to Dagny with the railroad. We have seen, however, that Francisco did accomplish something in that conversation with Rearden: he gave him a conceptual framework for his development going forward. The same is true of the present conversation with Dagny. It is interrupted by the news of the Winston Tunnel collapse, and she runs back to Taggart Transcontinental “as he had run at the sound of the alarm siren in Rearden's mills” (622). Prior to this, he introduces two crucial ideas.

As he did with Rearden, Francisco explains that the virtuous are responsible for the destruction of their own values because they “produced the wealth of the world” while “letting our enemies write its moral code.” Dagny answers, as Rearden could not have, that “we never accepted their code” but “lived by our own standards.” Francisco's response is significant:

Yes—and paid ransoms for it! Ransoms in matter and in spirit—in money, which our enemies received, but did not deserve, and in honor, which we deserved, but did not receive. *That* was our guilt—that we were willing to pay. We kept mankind alive, yet we allowed men to despise us and to worship our destroyers. We allowed them to worship incompetence and brutality, the recipients and the dispensers of the unearned. By accepting punishment, not for any sins, but for our virtues, we betrayed our code and made theirs possible. Dagny, theirs is the morality of kidnappers. They use your love of virtue as a hostage. They know that you'll bear anything in order to work and produce, because you know that achievement is man's highest moral purpose, that he can't exist without it, and your love of virtue is your love of life. They count on you to assume any burden. They count on you to feel that no effort is too great in the service of your love. (619)

Two weeks earlier, when contemplating the Gift Certificate for his Metal, Rearden reached this same identification of the world's morality as a “hostage system” (561), but the point is new to Dagny, and it has an immediate impact on her understanding of her own actions. When she returns to the world she is self-consciously paying ransoms: she instructs Eddie to give certain Taggart employees the authority to bribe “stooges of the Unification Board” with her own

money (“I’ll pay it”), and she challenges the “stooges” to sue her personally (628). Moreover, consider what she says to Rearden upon her return:

Hank, I don’t think they care whether there’s a train or a blast furnace left on earth. We do. They’re holding us by our love of it, and we’ll go on paying so long as there’s still one chance left to keep one single wheel alive and moving in token of human intelligence. We’ll go on holding it afloat, like our drowning child, and when the flood swallows it, we’ll go down with the last wheel and the last syllogism. I know what we’re paying, but—price is no object any longer. (632)

Francisco’s second crucial point to Dagny is that her tie to the looters is related to the spirit-body dichotomy. He is destroying d’Anconia Copper, he explains, out of love for the “spirit of which it was the shape” (617). When she describes Taggart Transcontinental as “almost like a living person” (619), he says that it is not any longer. Her belief that to abandon it would be “renouncing and giving up” is a result of her failure to grasp fully the relation between mind and body:

Dagny, we who’ve been called “materialists” by the killers of the human spirit, we’re the only ones who know how little value or meaning there is in material objects as such, because we’re the ones who create their value and meaning. We can afford to give them up, for a short while, in order to redeem something much more precious. We are the soul, of which railroads, copper mines, steel mills and oil wells are the body—and they are living entities that beat day and night, like our hearts, in the sacred function of supporting human life, but only so long as they remain our body, only so long as they remain the expression, the reward and the property of achievement. Without us, they are corpses and their sole product is poison, not wealth or food, the poison of disintegration that turns men into hordes of scavengers. Dagny, learn to understand the nature of your own power and you’ll understand the paradox you now see around you. You do not have to depend on any material possessions, they depend on you, you create them, you own the one and only tool of production. Wherever you are, you will always be able to produce. But the looters—by their own stated theory—are in desperate, permanent, congenital need and at the blind mercy of matter. Why don’t you take them at their word? They need railroads, factories, mines, motors, which they cannot make or run. Of what use will your railroad be to them without you? Who held it together? Who kept it alive? Who saved it, time and time again? Was it your brother James? Who fed him? Who fed the looters? Who produced their weapons? Who gave them the means to enslave you? The impossible spectacle of shabby little incompetents holding control over the products of genius—who made it possible? Who supported your enemies, who forged your chains, who destroyed your achievement? . . . Leave them the carcass of that railroad, leave them all the rusted rails and rotted ties and gutted engines—but don’t leave them your mind! Don’t leave them your mind! The fate of the world rests on that decision! (620)

During the first run of the John Galt Line, Dagny grasped that machines are animated by the men of the mind and would be still and worthless without them (245–56), and she understands that the railroad would be of no value to the looters without her; what she must “learn to understand”

is that it cannot be of any value *to her* so long as it is not “the reward and the property of achievement.”

We will see shortly how Francisco elaborates this point that evening, when he next sees Dagny. Notice first, that between these two conversations, when she returns to work, there is strong evidence of a breach between her mind and her body. Her voice has “the sound of a business machine”; her manner conveys to Eddie the sentiment that she would feel compassion and gratitude “if we were alive and free to feel, but we’re not”; and while “reciting a list of figures without a break,” she sweeps a display of propaganda magazines off her table with an “abrupt explosive movement of sheer physical brutality,” “as if there were no connection between her mind and the violence of her body” (627, 631). That evening, looking out at the city from her apartment, what she feels is not “the joy of working; it was only the clear, cold peace of a decision reached—and the stillness of unadmitted pain” (633). The city seems to be sinking into coils of “gray-blue fog,” and she likens it to the sinking of Atlantis “and all the other kingdoms that had vanished, leaving the same legend in all the languages of men, and the same longing.”

She felt—as she had felt it one spring night, slumped across her desk in the crumbling office of the John Galt Line, by a window facing a dark alley—the sense and vision of her own world, which she would never reach. . . . You—she thought—whoever you are, whom I have always loved and never found, you whom I expected to see at the end of the rails beyond the horizon, you whose presence I had always felt in the streets of the city and whose world I had wanted to build, it is my love for you that had kept me moving, my love and my hope to reach you and my wish to be worthy of you on the day when I would stand before you face to face. Now I know that I shall never find you—that it is not to be reached or lived—but what is left of my life is still yours, and I will go on in your name, even though it is a name I’ll never learn, I will go on serving you, even though I’m never to win, I will go on, to be worthy of you on the day when I would have met you, even though I won’t. . . . She had never accepted hopelessness, but she stood at the window and, addressed to the shape of a fogbound city, it was her self-dedication to unrequited love. (633–34)

She returns to work because she cannot “stand by and watch what they did at that tunnel” and “accept what they’re all accepting,” “that disasters are one’s natural fate, to be borne, not fought. I can’t accept submission. I can’t accept helplessness. I can’t accept renunciation. So long as there’s a railroad left to run, I’ll run it” (635). But in her determination to keep fighting, she has resigned herself to the view that her highest values are not to be attained. She tells Francisco that she is fighting not “in order to maintain the looters’ world,” but “to maintain the last strip of” hers. But it is only the last strip, and she does not have hope of maintaining even this for long; she expects to go down “with the last wheel and the last syllogism” (632).

Francisco pursues the line of thought we saw him introduce that morning, pushing her to identify why the railroad remains of value to her:

“I know why one loves one’s work. I know what it means to you, the job of running trains. But you would not run them if they were empty. Dagny, what is it you see when you think of a moving train?”

She glanced at the city. “The life of a man of ability who might have perished in that catastrophe, but will escape the next one, which I’ll prevent—a man who has an intransigent mind and an unlimited ambition, and is in love with his own life . . . the kind of man who is what we were when we started, you and I. You gave him up. I can’t.”

“Do you think that you can still serve him—that kind of man—by running the railroad? . . . You will stop on the day when you’ll discover that your work has been placed in the service, not of that man’s life, but of his destruction. . . . You said that we were of his kind once, you and I. We still are. But one of us has betrayed him.”

“Yes,” she said sternly, “one of us has. We cannot serve him by renunciation.”

“We cannot serve him by making terms with his destroyers.”

“I’m not making terms with them. They need me. They know it. It’s my terms that I’ll make them accept.”

“By playing a game in which they gain benefits in exchange for harming you?”

“If I can keep Taggart Transcontinental in existence, it’s the only benefit I want. What do I care if they make me pay ransoms? Let them have what they want. I’ll have the railroad.”

“He smiled. “Do you think so? Do you think that their need of you is your protection? Do you think that you can give them what they want? No, you won’t quit until you see, of your own sight and judgment, what it is that they really want. You know, Dagny, we were taught that some things belong to God and others to Caesar. Perhaps their God would permit it. But the man you say we’re serving—he does not permit it. He permits no divided allegiance, no war between your mind and your body, no gulf between your values and your actions, no tributes to Caesar. He permits no Caesars.” (635–36)

Dagny is, of course, thinking of the man at the end of the railroad tracks—her romantic ideal and the representative of her highest values, who she will later identify as John Galt. Francisco is thinking concretely of Galt, the man to whom he has given his life (517). The dialogue reframes the question of whether Dagny is right to return to work; the focus is now placed on how her work relates to the idea personified by Galt. Dagny thinks she is serving him, but Francisco argues that the man who loves his life cannot be served by her acceptance of a joyless existence in which she must surrender the values she creates as ransom to vicious men for the privilege of having created them. Later, in part III, Galt himself characterizes this policy as one of “carrying unchosen burdens, taking undeserved punishment, and believing that justice can be served by the offer of your own spirit to the most unjust of torturers” (813); and Dagny conceives of herself as accepting the role of a “victim” because “there’s still a chance to win” (1001).

Throughout, Dagny is willing to immolate herself in order to save the Taggart Transcontinental, which is her top value; but already, in part II, we have seen that she no longer finds any joy in the railroad, which has served to cannibalize rather than sustain the sorts of men she admires. She is in this impossible position because she cannot understand why this is the case—why the John Galt Line met the end that it did. Francisco now tells her that what she needs to understand is what the looters really want. When she does, she will see that her work on the

railroad is not in the service of Galt but of his destroyers and that this is why her values have always been inexplicably out of reach.

For the present, she is not yet free of the contradiction that has intensified over the course of her life. She reflects on it at the end of part II, looking down from her airplane as she flies to Utah in a desperate attempt to prevent Quentin Daniels from disappearing.

When she saw the lights of a town, like a handful of gold coins flung upon the prairie, the brightly violent lights fed by an electric current, they seemed as distant as the stars and now as unattainable. The energy that had lighted them was gone, the power that created power stations in empty prairies had vanished, and she knew of no journey to recapture it. Yet these had been her stars—she thought, looking down—these had been her goal, her beacon, the aspiration drawing her upon her upward course. That which others claimed to feel at the sight of the stars—stars safely distant by millions of years and thus imposing no obligation to act, but serving as the tinsel of futility—she had felt at the sight of electric bulbs lighting the streets of a town. It was this earth below that had been the height she wanted to reach, and she wondered how she had come to lose it, who had made of it a convict's ball to drag through muck, who had turned its promise of greatness into a vision never to be reached. (691)

Watching the sunlight struggle to break through the clouds, she hears in her mind a piece of music that is emblematic of her contradiction, “the cry of a tortured struggle, with the chords of its theme breaking through, like a distant vision to be reached” (692)—Halley's Fourth Concerto, which earlier in the novel is described as “a great cry of rebellion”

It was a “No” flung at some vast process of torture, a denial of suffering, a denial that held the agony of the struggle to break free. The sounds were like a voice saying: There is no necessity for pain—why, then, is the worst pain reserved for those who will not accept its necessity?—we who hold the love and the secret of joy, to what punishment have we been sentenced for it, and by whom? . . . The sounds of torture became defiance, the statement of agony became a hymn to a distant vision for whose sake anything was worth enduring, even this. It was the song of rebellion—and of a desperate quest. (67)

When Dagny opens her eyes after crashing the plane, she sees “sunlight, green leaves” and the face of John Galt, and she hears the triumphant theme of Halley's Fifth Concerto—“The Concerto of Deliverance” which “swept space clean” in the “joy of an unobstructed effort” and “spoke in laughing astonishment at the discovery that there was no ugliness or pain, and there never had had to be.” “This was the world as she had expected to see it at sixteen—and now she had reached it” (701, 13).

The valley is Atlantis—the world she has been seeking her whole life—“her goal, the end of track, the point beyond the curve of the earth where the two straight lines of rail met and vanished” (748, cf. 765)—and Galt is the man who holds the rails in his hand; he is the worthy adversary she could never find, the inventor of the motor that had kept her going in her darkest hours, and the “consciousness like her own who would be the meaning of her world as she would be of his” (220). However, Dagny is not ready to join Galt's strike:

the pull of the outer world [. . .] was the vision of Hank Rearden's courage and the courage of all those still fighting to stay alive. He would not give up the search for her plane, when all others had long since despaired, as he would not give up his mills, as he would not give up any goal he had chosen if a single chance was left. Was she certain that no chance remained for the world of Taggart Transcontinental? Was she certain that the terms of the battle were such that she could not care to win? They were right, the men of Atlantis, they were right to vanish if they knew that they left no value behind them—but until and unless she saw that no chance was untaken and no battle unfought, she had *no right* to remain among them. This was the question that had lashed her for weeks, but had not driven her to a glimpse of the answer. (801–2)

During her month in the valley, no less than in Woodstock over the previous month, she cannot renounce the railroad unless she is convinced that it is “impossible or improper” to preserve it. To do so would be to commit treason against all of her values, indeed against values as such. Taggart Transcontinental is the central value around which she has organized her life and to simply walk away from it would be to adopt the attitude that even the things one thinks of as most important are not worth fighting for. This casual attitude is the opposite of the principle on which Dagny has lived her life. Were she to accept it by abandoning the railroad, she would be betraying everything that she has lived by and cared about—the very things that make the valley and Galt so important to her. Thus she must return to the world: “So long as I choose to go on living, I can't desert a battle which I think is mine to fight” (807).

In Woodstock, she was trying to find a purpose for her life without the railroad, and she found that any project she could undertake would lead her back to the railroad and its world. This is true concretely in the case of projects like reclaiming the local apple orchards, because the produce would need to be shipped by rail (610). But even in cases where she would not need to have direct dealings with Taggart Transcontinental, any purpose she could conceive for herself would eventually take her back into the world where Directive 10-289 was law, the world in which her office of Vice-President in Charge of Operation was turned into that of a slave and a slave driver.

She could renounce the railroad, she thought; she could find contentment here, in this forest; but she would build the path, then reach the road below, then rebuild the road—and then she would reach the storekeeper of Woodstock and that would be the end, and the empty white face staring at the universe in stagnant apathy would be the limit placed on her effort. Why?—she heard herself screaming aloud. There was no answer. (611)

She was tortured because acting on anything more than a trivial scale required making contact with the world she was trying to renounce.

In the valley, though there are more interesting and larger projects to undertake, the problem remains essentially the same. After a moment of excitement over the possibility of building a small railroad to service Francisco's copper mine, she cries in despair, “Oh, what for? To build three miles of railroad and abandon a transcontinental system!” (794). The apathetic stare of the storekeeper is still placing a limit on Dagny's effort; her sphere of action can now extend through the valley, but no further. She sees the valley, like the cabin in Woodstock, as a small and remote place where she can take refuge from the wider world in which she is



inexplicably unable to achieve her values. Thus, she sees the decision to go on strike as giving up the world to the looters and letting them limit the sphere of one's action to an isolated "underground." And she cannot accept this because her basic conviction is that *the world* is "mine to shape in the image of my highest values and never to be given up to a lesser standard, no matter how hard or long the struggle." Thus she tells Galt:

It was this valley that I saw as possible and would exchange for nothing less and would not give up to a mindless evil. I am going back to fight for this valley—to release it from its underground, to regain for it its full and rightful realm, to let the earth belong to you in fact, as it does in spirit—and to meet you again on the day when I'm able to deliver to you the whole of the world. (812)

In Atlantis she finds the sort of life that she has always known is possible, but she is not content to let it remain exiled in an underground valley, and so she resolves to fight for it in the outside world.

In fact, the strikers have not given up the world. They are waiting for the collapse of society—"the day when the looters will perish, but we won't" (635)—at which point they will return to "rebuild the world" (748). They now think this day will come within their own lifetimes, but Galt did not think this when he began the strike, and he did not yet have (or anticipate) a valley where the strikers could create a society of their own. Nevertheless, he did not conceive of himself as giving up the world to the looters. Rather he recognized that his work as an inventor was undermining his own values, and he realized *why* this was happening and why it *had* to happen, given the sort of people with whom he was dealing; so he resolved to "put an end [. . .] once and for all" to the sort of society geared to such people and to create for the first time the conditions under which it would be possible to achieve one's highest values (671). Values *cannot* be attained in the looters' world, so by dropping out of it the strikers are not *giving up* anything; rather they are undertaking

a struggle that consists of rising from ledge to ledge in a steady ascent to the top, a struggle where the hardships are investments in your future, and the victories bring you irreversibly closer to the world of your moral ideal, and should you die without reaching full sunlight, you will die on a level touched by its rays. (1068)

The strikers see the valley as a ledge reached in this struggle—not a retreat from the world, but the beginning of a new one.

Dagny cannot see it this way because she does not yet understand what is wrong with the existing society and why it cannot be redeemed. She still does not see why the John Galt Line *had* to end as it did and, more generally, why any productive work in the looters' society necessarily undermines one's values. Consequently she still thinks she can serve Galt by returning to the railroad. When she returned from Woodstock, Francisco attributed this view to a mistake about the looters' motivation—to her not knowing "what they really want." When she decides to return from the valley, she is explicit about what she thinks they want and about what role this plays in her decision.

If you want to know the one reason that's taking me back, I'll tell you: 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—because I cannot believe that men can refuse to see, that they can remain blind

and deaf to us forever, when the truth is ours and their lives depend on accepting it. They still love their lives—and that is the uncorrupted remnant of their minds. So long as men desire to live, I cannot lose my battle.

“Do they desire it?” asks Akston softly, inviting her to “take that question back with you as the last premise left for you to check” (807).

During her stay in the valley, Dagny’s tie to the looters is essentialized into this single premise, and Akston’s question sets the context for her thoughts across the remainder of part III, in which she checks and ultimately rejects it. With this premise in mind, and reinvigorated by the spirit of the valley, Dagny returns to the world with the conviction that victory is possible. She had returned from Woodstock convinced that her highest values were “not to be reached or lived,” and resolved to fight for the world represented by the man at the end of the railroad tracks though she would never learn his name—to serve him “even though I’m never to win.” When she leaves the valley, she has met that man and she is determined to win the world for him.

Concretely, she thinks that, because of the rapid deterioration of the economy, the looters will have to relinquish power in order to avert total collapse: they will eventually listen to reason and repeal their controls, just as they were anxious to make any “special exceptions” she might request in the immediate aftermath of the Winston Tunnel catastrophe (630). Shortly after Galt gives his speech, she tells Eddie:

There will be no looters’ government within ten days. Then men like Cuffy Meigs will devour the last of our rails and engines. Should I lose the battle by failing to wait one more moment? How can I let it go—Taggart Transcontinental, Eddie—go forever, when one last effort can still keep it in existence? . . . I’m not helping the looters. Nothing can help them now. (1078)<sup>21</sup>

By saving the railroad, she thinks she will make it possible for the strikers to return to an industrial nation, with infrastructure and institutions that can be restored, rather than to a country in anarchy, composed of “starving robber gangs fighting to rob one another” and “hidden outposts” of civilization (1067).

Of course, Dagny knows that the world is collapsing as quickly as it is precisely because of the strike. Her position would be a straightforward form of hypocrisy if she did not think that there is some way that the strikers could have achieved their aims without going on strike. She never expresses this view after Galt tells her of the strike, but immediately before he tells her she comments that Akston’s book on ethics could “save the world” if it were published outside of the valley (738). Presumably she continues to think that if the strikers had remained in the world, they could have reversed the course of the nation by advocating for the right philosophy and taking actions such as Rearden did at his trial. This is not an unreasonable view: such actions are precisely what Rand herself advocated in the actual world, and, even within the world of the novel, Francisco says that Rearden “could have saved the world” three generations earlier (487). In the course of those generations, however, the America of the novel has reached a point of no return; its soul has become fully infected by a mystical morality that is driven by and fosters a hatred of existence (1061). Dagny has yet to understand its nature or motivation—she has yet to understand the villains. When she does, she will see why it is impossible to make terms with them, and why their world must be utterly destroyed in order for hers to be realized.

## DELIVERANCE

I wrote earlier that part III of the novel is essentially metaphysical. In part II, the heroes' actions are characterized in predominantly moral terms; part III recasts them in terms of their relation to reality as such. Galt, for example, is described as having "that look of respectful severity with which a man stands before the fact that the truth is the truth" (725), and both he and Rearden talk about the disastrous consequences of "faking reality" (795, 859–60). Likewise, the villains, who were earlier shown to evade particular facts or responsibilities, are now portrayed as attempting to escape the law of identity and to reverse the relation between consciousness and existence (1035–36). Across part III, what Dagny and Rearden come to understand is the way the villains view reality, the motivation associated with this, and their own responsibility for making this way of existence possible.

Dagny returns to a world approaching final collapse, in which everyone is struggling to avoid the knowledge of what is happening and why. On her flight to New York, she notices the other passengers listening as though they comprehend it the broadcast of an unintelligible speech: "these people pretend to themselves that they are not pretending; they know no other state of existence" (833). Having returned to the world with the mission (from Akston) to understand the looters and to check her premise that they want to survive, she is keenly alert to how deeply different the people she encounters are from herself. This is especially the case with villains such as Jim. Back in the office, she learns of the Railroad Unification Plan, which will obviously destroy the railroad industry in a matter of months:

Jim had always managed to switch the weight of his failures upon the strongest plants around him and to survive by destroying them to pay for his errors, as he had done with Dan Conway, as he had done with the industries of Colorado; but this did not have even the rationality of a looter—this pouncing upon the drained carcass of a weaker, a half-bankrupt competitor for a moment's delay, with nothing but a cracking bone between the pouncer and the abyss.

The impulse of the habit of reason almost pushed her to speak, to argue, to demonstrate the self-evident—but she looked at their faces and she saw that they knew it. In some terms different from hers, in some inconceivable manner of consciousness, they knew all that she could tell them, it was useless to prove to them the irrational horror of their course and of its consequences, both Meigs and Taggart knew it—and the secret of their consciousness was the means by which they escaped the finality of their knowledge. (842)

She has returned on the premise that men value their lives and so cannot remain blind and deaf forever when the truth is hers and their lives depend on accepting it. But Jim and Meigs are not open to reason, though they face "the abyss." She sees now that the villains have some other manner of consciousness of which she cannot conceive. She comes a step closer to understanding how they escape the finality of their knowledge when she connects this issue to the question of moral sanction. Jim and the other looters are desperate for her to make a statement reassuring the public that "it isn't true that Directive 10-289 is destroying industry, that it's a sound piece of legislation devised for everybody's good, and that if they'll just be patient a little longer, things will improve and prosperity will return" (844). She realizes that they need "her sanction, not to reassure their victims, but to reassure themselves" (846). It is significant

that in sanctioning the plan Dagny would be giving them her assurance that it *could work*, that it could save them.

The Plan's inevitable result is destruction: the railroad is consumed by maggots such as Meigs, an "undisguised gangster" who loots its assets and sells them in other countries. With mass starvation imminent, Dagny wonders what the looters are "counting on." As if in answer to her question Jim demands: "You must do something! . . . It's *your* job, it's your province, it's your duty! . . . To act. To do. . . . How should I know [what]? It's *your* special talent. You're the doer." It is Dagny that he's counting on, though he is not counting on any *specific* action from her; he knows of no action that would save him, and he evades the growing realization that no such action is possible.

She chuckled. *There* was the form of the formless, 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, to defeat it without disturbing its game. (915)

The sanction Jim wants from her is the acceptance of this role, and the pretense that there is a solution; she refuses to grant it: "You're asking for reassurance, Jim. You're not going to get it. [ . . . ] I'm not going to help you pretend—by arguing with you—that the reality you're talking about is not what it is, that there's still a way to make it work and to save your neck. There isn't" (916).

As when Rearden refused to grant the sanction of the victim to his family at Thanksgiving or to the government at his trial, the response Dagny gets is not anger or reprisal but retreat. Jim asks in "the feebly uncertain voice of a man on the verge of abdication" what *she* would do, and we have the first real test of her theory that the villains cannot remain blind forever. Without her help, Jim can no longer pretend that the Unification Plan can work and he is ready to listen to her alternative. She gives it: "Give up—all of you, you and your Washington friends and your looting planners and the whole of your cannibal philosophy. Give up and get out of the way and let those of us who can, start from scratch out of the ruins." His response is telling:

"No!" The explosion came, oddly, now; it was the scream of a man who would die rather than betray his idea, and it came from a man who had spent his life evading the existence of ideas, acting with the expediency of a criminal. She wondered whether she had ever understood the essence of criminals. She wondered about the nature of the loyalty to the idea of denying ideas.

"No!" he cried, his voice lower, hoarser and more normal, sinking from the tone of a zealot to the tone of an overbearing executive. "That's impossible! That's out of the question! . . . Why do you always think of the impractical? Why don't you accept reality as it *is* and do something about it? You're the realist, you're the doer, the mover, the producer, the Nat Taggart, you're the person who's able to achieve any goal she chooses! You could save us now, you could find a way to make things work—if you *wanted* to!" (916–17)

Notice that Jim would rather *die* than betray his idea. The fact that life depends on rejecting it will not prevent him being blind and deaf to Dagny when she presents an alternative. She begins to realize that there is something about his motivation—about the motivation of criminals—that she has never understood. Jim is not an idealist willing to die for some principle,

he has spent his life evading the need to act on principle, and Dagny recognizes that the idea to which he is clinging is a means of evasion. It is a mechanism by which the looters attempt to avert the responsibility of thinking by inducing the producers to accept “the will of Cuffy Meigs as a *fact* of nature, irrevocable and absolute like steel, rails and gravitation”—to “accept the Meigs-made world as an objective, unchangeable reality”—and to “continue producing abundance in that world” (917).<sup>22</sup> But she still does not understand how Jim can cling to this evasion in the face of all the facts when his life is on the line. She still does not understand his motivation, but she is coming to see that there is a question.

Rearden grasps the answer before she does. The crucial step comes when his brother Philip alleges, in the course of demanding a job from him, that he has never had any feelings: “You’ve never felt anything at all. You’ve never *suffered!*”

It was as if a sum of years hit Rearden in the face, by means of a sensation and a sight: the exact sensation of what he had felt in the cab of the first train’s engine on the John Galt Line—and the sight of Philip’s eyes, the pale; half-liquid eyes presenting the uttermost of human degradation: an uncontested pain, and, with the obscene insolence of a skeleton toward a living being, demanding that this pain be held as the highest of values. You’ve never suffered, the eyes were saying to him accusingly—while he was seeing the night in his office when his ore mines were taken away from him—the moment when he had signed the Gift Certificate surrendering Rearden Metal—the month of days inside a plane that searched for the remains of Dagny’s body. You’ve never suffered, the eyes were saying with self-righteous scorn—while he remembered the sensation of proud chastity with which he had fought through those moments, refusing to surrender to pain, a sensation made of his love, of his loyalty, of his knowledge that joy is the goal of existence, and joy is not to be stumbled upon, but to be achieved, and the act of treason is to let its vision drown in the swamp of the moment’s torture. You’ve never suffered, the dead stare of the eyes was saying, you’ve never felt anything, because only to suffer is to feel—there’s no such thing as joy, there’s only pain and the absence of pain, only pain and the zero, when one feels nothing—I suffer, I’m twisted by suffering, I’m made of undiluted suffering, that’s my purity, that’s my virtue—and yours, you the untwisted one, you the uncomplaining, yours is to relieve me of my pain—cut your unsuffering body to patch up mine, cut your unfeeling soul to stop mine from feeling—and we’ll achieve the ultimate ideal, the triumph over life, the zero! He was seeing the nature of those who, for centuries, had not recoiled from the preachers of annihilation—he was seeing the nature of the enemies he had been fighting all his life. (931–32)

As I discuss in my other contribution to this volume, joy and positive desires result from setting values and achieving them.<sup>23</sup> Because the villains in *Atlas Shrugged* do not do this, they do not experience the sorts of feelings that motivate the heroes. They experience only negative emotions such as fear and pain, which they seek to alleviate. This is the only a form of motivation possible to men who do not use their minds. The state they seek to achieve is not a positive but the removal of a negative. This is a significant theme in Galt’s Speech, where he describes this “zero worship” as the “secret core” of the Morality of Death, and points out that death is the only state that fulfills the zero-worshippers ideal (1031–32). Rearden doesn’t yet grasp these implications. His immediate identification of the point is that there are men who

“worship pain.” During his next encounter with his family, when they beg his forgiveness and beseech him to continue to immolate himself to save them, he grasps one of the crucial implications that Galt will draw in his speech. “Henry, don’t abandon us!” cries his mother, “Don’t sentence us to perish! Whatever we are, we’re human! We want to live!” He responds, passing from astonishment to horror as the thought strikes him: “Why, no, I don’t think you do. If you did, you would have known how to value me” (973).

For Dagny, this is the final premise left to check, and when she comes to the same conclusion, four chapters later, she immediately goes on strike. Rearden’s context is slightly different. Since identifying the worship of pain, he has come to feel progressively detached from and disinterested in a society comprised of beings he can no longer regard as people. He could not “grant any anger, indignation or moral concern to the senseless motions of the unliving; no, worse, he thought—the anti-living” (932). He takes the realization that his family and, in general, villains, do not want to live in this same spirit. Whereas Dagny’s central error is a misunderstanding of the motives of evil people, this realization on Rearden’s part comes as a mere coda to what he had realized about them when confronted with the Gift Certificate. Having made these realizations he feels divorced from the world in which he has lived, a feeling that extends even to the mills—“no, he was not indifferent to his mills; but the feeling which had once been passion for a living entity was now like the wistful tenderness one feels for the memory of the loved and dead. The special quality of what one feels for the dead, he thought, is that no action is possible any longer” (964).

What ties him to the world is a failure to realize the role he is still playing in supporting the looters. He grasps now that there is something left to see and is going through his days “as if some final knowledge were in the process of unraveling before him, a process not to be hastened or stopped” (964). The process reaches its culmination a few hours after his realization about his family, at a meeting of bureaucrats who present him with the blatantly irrational Steel Unification Plan. It is modeled after the Railroad Unification Plan and will destroy Rearden Steel and the industry as a whole in a matter of months. In the ensuing discussion three “tumblers” click in Rearden’s mind, the last of which is described as “completing the sum and releasing the intricate lock, the answer uniting all the pieces, the questions and the unsolved wounds of his life” (986).

The first tumbler is Dr. Ferris’ statement: “You won’t go bankrupt. You’ll always produce. You can’t help it. It’s in your blood. Or, to be more scientific: you’re conditioned that way” (984–85). As Jim had wanted Dagny to accept Meigs’ edicts as natural laws, so Ferris treats it as a law of nature that Rearden will always create values, no matter what the conditions. The second tumbler concerns these conditions. When Rearden says that there is nothing possible ahead except starvation, Lawson responds: “Well, after all, you businessmen have kept predicting disasters for years, you’ve cried catastrophe at every progressive measure and told us that we’ll perish—but we haven’t” (985). They haven’t perished because Rearden, Dagny and others had saved them, which brings us to the third tumbler—Jim Taggart’s cry, “Oh, you’ll do something!”

Then—even though it was only a sentence he had heard all his life—he felt a deafening crash within him, as of a steel door dropping open at the touch of the final tumbler. . . . In the moment of silence after the crash, it seemed to him that he heard Francisco’s voice, asking him quietly in the ballroom of this building, yet asking it also here and now: “Who is the guiltiest man in this room?” He heard his own answer of the past: “I suppose—James Taggart?” and Francisco’s voice

saying without reproach: “No, Mr. Rearden, it’s not James Taggart,”—but here, in this room and this moment, his mind answered: “I am.”

He had cursed these looters for their stubborn blindness? It was he who had made it possible. From the first extortion he had accepted, from the first directive he had obeyed, he had given them cause to believe that reality was a thing to be cheated, that one could demand the irrational and someone somehow would provide it. If he had accepted the Equalization of Opportunity Bill, if he had accepted Directive 10-289, if he had accepted the law that those who could not equal his ability had the right to dispose of it, that those who had not earned were to profit, but he who had was to lose, that those who could not think were to command, but he who could was to obey them—then were they illogical in believing that they existed in an irrational universe? He had made it for them, he had provided it. Were they illogical in believing that theirs was only *to wish*, to wish with no concern for the possible—and that *his* was to fulfill their wishes, by means they did not have to know or name? They, the impotent mystics, struggling to escape the responsibility of reason, had known that he, the rationalist, had undertaken to serve their whims. They had known that he had given them a blank check on reality—his was not to ask *why?*—*theirs* was not to ask *how?*—let them demand that he give them a share of his wealth, then all that he owns, then more than he owns—impossible?—no, *he’ll do something!* . . . He was seeing the progression of the years, the monstrous extortions, the impossible demands, the inexplicable victories of evil, the preposterous plans and unintelligible goals proclaimed in volumes of muddy philosophy, the desperate wonder of the victims who thought that some complex, malevolent wisdom was moving the powers destroying the world—and all of it had rested on one tenet behind the shifty eyes of the victors: *he’ll do something!* . . . We’ll get away with it—he’ll let us—*he’ll do something!* . . .

You businessmen kept predicting that we’d perish, but we haven’t. . . . It was true, he thought. They had not been blind to reality, *he* had—blind to the reality he himself had created. No, they had not perished, but who had? Who had perished to pay for their manner of survival? Ellis Wyatt . . . Ken Danagger . . . Francisco d’Anconia. (986–87)

With the clicking of this tumbler Rearden has come to the end of the trail, and we can see how what he learns in this moment depends on and integrates earlier steps down the road he has traveled. It is worth recalling some of these to indicate the pattern. When initially visited by the bureaucrat from the State Science Institute who looked like a traffic cop, he grasped that the looters need some sort of sanction from him. By degrees he grasped that the productive activity on which human life depends and on which he always prided himself is the essence of morality and that the sanction the looters need from him is his acceptance of their alien moral standard. He learned how this acceptance fed on and contributed to a gulf between his mind and his body, his ideals and his actions, his ends and his means—how it amounted to allowing them to specify the ends to which his virtue would be the means. Now he sees that, in always finding a way to continue producing despite the irrational, unjust, and increasingly onerous burdens placed on him, he was sanctioning and making possible a way of life in which the whims of the vicious, who have no genuine values, are fulfilled at the expense of the virtuous, whose values can, as a consequence, never be realized.

This is the final step for Rearden of the road that all the strikers must travel “to Atlantis” (637), and we can see that he has reached the destination in the way he looks at his mills, when he sees them again hours later:

He had never loved his mills as he did in that moment, for—seeing them by an act of his own vision, cleared of all but his own code of values, in a luminous reality that held no contradictions—he was seeing the reason of his love: the mills were an achievement of his mind, devoted to his enjoyment of existence, erected in a rational world to deal with rational men. If those men had vanished, if that world was gone, if his mills had ceased to serve his values—then the mills were only a pile of dead scrap, to be left to crumble, the sooner the better—to be left, not as an act of treason, but as an act of loyalty to their actual meaning. (988)

He grasps here what Francisco had earlier tried to convey to Dagny about Taggart Transcontinental. It is a corpse, of no value, except when it is able to serve the lives of the rational men who produce and sustain it. And Rearden sees now why his mills cannot serve his life, because he sees now what social context is required for them to do so. As a result, his feeling of detachment is gone: the pain that he had had to bear because of the mills is passed and he can now love them without contradiction for everything they were to him. But the mills are only a remnant or promise of the world in which such values can be achieved without contradictions and serve their proper purpose. Rearden has now reached that world, and the mills are to be left behind.

Rearden’s progression to this point is a complex series of inductions from the events in the novel, which culminates in a changed perspective on the world—a new moral philosophy—that leads him to join the strike. Only when this progression is completed, do we find a systematic exposition of this philosophy in Galt’s Speech. The speech contains few ideas which have not been made explicit earlier in the novel.<sup>24</sup> Its primary function is to bring order to what has been learned so far, and completes the novel’s presentation of its philosophy.

There remains, however, one plot conflict to resolve. Dagny must come to understand the villains’ motivation. Rearden has grasped that they do not value their lives, and Galt has made this point in his speech. But she continues not to see it. The point is essential, because so long as she believes that they value their lives, she thinks that she has some common ground with them and that it will be possible to come to terms: in loyalty to their love of their lives, the looters will eventually have to renounce their irrational way of life when they can no longer evade that the alternative is death. That Dagny expects it is evident from what she says to Mr. Thompson in the immediate aftermath of Galt’s Speech:

You’re through. Don’t you see that you’re through? What else do you need, after what you’ve heard? Give up and get out of the way. Leave men free to exist. . . . You’re still alive, you’re using a human language, you’re asking for answers, you’re counting on reason—you’re still counting on reason, God damn you! You’re able to understand. It isn’t possible that you haven’t understood. There’s nothing you can now pretend to hope, to want or gain or grab or reach. There’s nothing but destruction ahead, the world’s and your own. Give up and get out. . . . You wish to live, don’t you? Get out of the way, if you want a chance. Let those who can, take over. He knows what to do. You don’t. He is able to create the means of human survival. You aren’t. . . . You know the truth, all of you, and so



do I, and so does every man who's heard John Galt! What else are you waiting for? For proof? He's given it to you. For facts? They're all around you. How many corpses do you intend to pile up before you renounce it—your guns, your power, your controls and the whole of your miserable altruistic creed? Give it up, if you want to live. Give it up, if there's anything left in your mind that's still able to want human beings to remain alive on this earth! (1073)

Since her return from the valley she has been gradually coming to understand the villains' way of life, but she has not yet reached the end of the trail. We have already discussed her initial steps along it. There is one more significant development prior to Galt's Speech. It occurs during a dinner meeting between Dagny, Jim, Mouch, Lawson, Ferris, Weatherby, and Meigs to discuss the future of the railroad system, which has been destroyed by the Unification Plan and cannot continue to run in its present condition. Dagny takes her invitation to the meeting as "an acknowledgement of the fact that they needed her and, perhaps, the first step of their surrender" (944). During the meeting it becomes clear that this is not the case. She is asked questions but is "interrupted before she had completed the first sentence of the answer" and her name is "tossed into the conversation at half-hour intervals, tossed perfunctorily with the speaker's eyes never glancing in her direction." It becomes clear that they want her there only in order to "delude themselves into believing that she had agreed" with the decisions they reached; so by being present she grants just the sort of sanction or reassurance that she earlier refused Jim (945–46).

The decision that needs to be reached is whether to discontinue transcontinental traffic or the Minnesota branch line. Closing the former would cut off "our lines of communication over a third of the continent," but that third consists of "empty miles of westerns sands, of scraggly pastures and abandoned fields," whereas the Minnesota line services "the Mesabi Range, the last of the major sources of iron ore" and "the Minnesota farmers, . . . the best producers of wheat in the country. . . . [T]he end of Minnesota would end Wisconsin, then Michigan, then Illinois"; it would mean "the red breath of the factories dying out over the industrial East." Thus Dagny argues for preserving the Minnesota line:

give us leeway to save the Eastern states. That's all that's left of the country—and of the world. If you let us save that, we'll have a chance to rebuild the rest. If not, it's the end. . . . Let us shrink back to the start of this country, but let us hold that start. We'll run no trains west of the Missouri. We'll become a local railroad—the local of the industrial East. Let us save our industries. There's nothing left to save in the West. You can run agriculture for centuries by manual labor and ox-carts. But destroy the last of this country's industrial plant—and centuries of effort won't be able to rebuild it or to gather the economic strength to make a start. How do you expect our industries—or railroads—to survive without steel? How do you expect any steel to be produced if you cut off the supply of iron ore? Save Minnesota, whatever's left of it. The country? You have no country to save, if its industries perish. You can sacrifice a leg or an arm. You can't save a body by sacrificing its heart and brain. Save our industries. Save Minnesota. Save the Eastern Seaboard. (946–47)

The planners are unmoved. Meigs in particular insists that the "transcontinental dragnet" must be preserved: "you won't be able to keep people in line unless you have transportation—troop transportation." Lawson's "soft lips twist into a smile" when he speaks of having the

“courage” to sacrifice thousands of people. Ferris, citing the example of nonindustrial India, muses that “the importance of industry to a civilization has been grossly overemphasized” (947).

Then she saw the answer; she saw the secret premise behind their words. . . .  
[T]hese men were moved forward, not by the image of an industrial skyline, but by the vision of that form of existence which the industrialists had swept away—the vision of a fat, unhygienic rajah of India, with vacant eyes staring in indolent stupor out of stagnant layers of flesh, with nothing to do but run precious gems through his fingers and, once in a while, stick a knife into the body of a starved, toil-dazed, germ-eaten creature, as a claim to a few grains of the creature’s rice, then claim it from hundreds of millions of such creatures and thus let the rice grains gather into gems.

She had thought that industrial production was a value not to be questioned by anyone; she had thought that these men’s urge to expropriate the factories of others was their acknowledgment of the factories’ value. She, born of the industrial revolution, had not held as conceivable, had forgotten along with the tales of astrology and alchemy, what these men knew in their secret, furtive souls, knew not by means of thought, but by means of that nameless muck which they called their instincts and emotions: that so long as men struggle to stay alive, they’ll never produce so little but that the man with the club won’t be able to seize it and leave them still less, provided millions of them are willing to submit . . . — that the feudal baron did not need electronic factories in order to drink his brains away out of jeweled goblets, and neither did the rajahs of the People’s State of India.

She saw what they wanted and to what goal their “instincts,” which they called unaccountable, were leading them. She saw that Eugene Lawson, the humanitarian, took pleasure at the prospect of human starvation—and Dr. Ferris, the scientist, was dreaming of the day when men would return to the hand-plow.

Incredulity and indifference were her only reaction: incredulity, because she could not conceive of what would bring human beings to such a state—indifference, because she could not regard those who reached it, as human any longer. They went on talking, but she was unable to speak or to listen. She caught herself feeling that her only desire was now to get home and fall asleep. (948)

Dagny’s realization here is parallel to Rearden’s realization (in the same chapter) that certain men worship pain. Both are recognitions of a difference between the ultimate motivations of the heroes and the villains—a difference deep enough to make the heroes question whether the villains are human at all. Notice, though, that this is not a recognition that the villains do not want to live—the unhygienic rajah is, after all, alive. What Dagny does see is that there can be no real community of values with such creatures, no basis for interaction. This is why, for both Dagny and Rearden, the realization engenders a sense of detachment from a world populated by such people. We saw how Rearden moves quickly from this stage to the realization that his family do not want to live, because if they did they would “know how to value him.” But to Dagny the state of a consciousness that does not love life remains inconceivable. When, after Rearden has gone on strike, the looters bemoan his loss, she wonders, “If they see Hank Rearden’s value now, why didn’t they see it sooner? Why hadn’t they averted their own doom and spared him years of torture? She found no answer” (1002). Convinced that they want to live,

she cannot understand why they did not value him, and for the same reason she thinks that they must reverse course eventually. This is why she is bewildered by their response to Galt's Speech (1074).

Dagny comes to understand the villains only through the episode of Galt's capture. He tells her, after she has inadvertently led them to him: "You haven't seen the nature of our enemies. You'll see it now. If I have to be the pawn in the demonstration that will convince you, I'm willing to be—and to win you from them, once and for all" (1091). This is what happens. In order to save Galt she must pretend to take his enemies' side, which requires her to emulate them in action; and in doing this, she approximates their mode of consciousness which had until now been unreal to her. We can see her beginning to understand it in the narration of her thoughts as she denounces Galt to Thompson:

It was easy, she thought. It would have been difficult in that distant time when she had regarded language as a tool of honor, always to be used as if one were under oath—an oath of allegiance to reality and to respect for human beings. Now it was only a matter of making sounds, inarticulate sounds addressed to inanimate objects unrelated to such concepts as reality, human or honor. . . . It had been easy, because she had felt as if she were in some dreary non-world, where her words and actions were not facts any longer—not reflections of reality, but only distorted postures in one of those side-show mirrors that project deformity for the perception of beings whose consciousness is not to be treated as consciousness. Thin, single and hot, like the burning pressure of a wire within her, like a needle selecting her course, was her only concern: the thought of his safety. The rest was a blur of shapeless dissolution, half-acid, half-fog.

But this—she thought with a shudder—was the state in which they lived, all those people whom she had never understood, this was the state they desired, this rubber reality, this task of pretending, distorting, deceiving, with the credulous stare of some Mr. Thompson's panic-bleary eyes as one's only purpose and reward. Those who desired this state—she wondered—did they want to live? (1109)

Here we see Dagny asking for the first time in her own voice whether the villains want to live. We will see shortly how she answers the question.

The final steps of Dagny's decision to go on strike are complicated somewhat by the existential circumstance that Galt, the love of her life, is in immediate danger. As a result her immediate concern is not running the railroad, as it would be if she were not on strike, but she cannot abandon the railroad and her old life as she would if she were on strike. She is in a kind of limbo. From the moment of Galt's capture, there is no question in her mind that she will join the strike. Eddie tells her that he knows she will quit as soon as Galt is free and she does not disagree; indeed she tries to discourage him from flying to San Francisco to reinstate the halted transcontinental traffic: "It doesn't matter now. There's nothing to save" (1116). However, she does not yet have the perspective on the world that is characteristic of the strikers—the perspective with which we saw Rearden look on his mills for the last time. Her state is similar to Rearden's earlier that morning, when he was waiting for the final knowledge to unravel before him. The dominant emotion she feels now, as she begins to question whether the villains want to live, is still a form of indifference:

Were she able to feel—she thought as she walked through the concourse of the Terminal—she would know that the heavy indifference she now felt for her railroad was hatred. She could not get rid of the feeling that she was running nothing but freight trains: the passengers, to her, were not living or human. It seemed senseless to waste such enormous effort on preventing catastrophes, on protecting the safety of trains carrying nothing but inanimate objects. She looked at the faces in the Terminal: if he were to die, she thought, to be murdered by the rulers of their system, that these might continue to eat, sleep and travel—would she work to provide them with trains? If she were to scream for their help, would one of them rise to his defense? Did they want him to live, they who had heard him?

The check for five hundred thousand dollars was delivered to her office, that afternoon; it was delivered with a bouquet of flowers from Mr. Thompson. She looked at the check and let it flutter down to her desk: it meant nothing and made her feel nothing, not even a suggestion of guilt. It was a scrap of paper, of no greater significance than the ones in the office wastebasket. Whether it could buy a diamond necklace or the city dump or the last of her food, made no difference. It would never be spent. It was not a token of value and nothing it purchased could be of value. But this—she thought—this inanimate indifference was the permanent state of the people around her, of men who had no purpose and no passion. This was the state of a non-valuing soul; those who chose it—she wondered—did they want to live? (1109)

It is this experience of indifference that enables her to understand the villains' psychology, and when she fully understands it the indifference vanishes. Running to a phone booth to call Francisco, after her final realization, she has "the sense of freedom of a world that had never had to be obstructed" (1136). "It did not make her feel estranged from the city: it made her feel, for the first time, that she owned the city and that she loved it, that she had never loved it before as she did in this moment, with so personal, solemn and confident a sense of possession" (1133).

We witness Dagny's progression from indifference to the strikers' perspective during and immediately after the banquet to announce the "John Galt Plan." As she looks at the faces of the different attendees, connecting what she notices about them with points from Galt's Speech, she continues to ask whether they desire to live. Increasingly the question takes on a rhetorical character, as she grasps that they do not.

Don't they see the hallmark of death in those faces, and the hallmark of life in his? Which state do they wish to choose? Which state do they seek for mankind? . . . She looked at the faces in the ballroom. They were nervously blank; they showed nothing but the sagging weight of lethargy and the staleness of a chronic fear. They were looking at Galt and at Mouch, as if unable to perceive any difference between them or to feel concern if a difference existed, their empty, uncritical, unvaluing stare declaring: "Who am I to know?" She shuddered, remembering his sentence: "The man who declares, 'Who am I to know?' is declaring, 'Who am I to live?'" Did they care to live?—she thought. They did not seem to care even for the effort of raising that question. . . . She saw a few faces who seemed to care. They were looking at Galt with a desperate plea, with a

wistfully tragic admiration—and with hands lying limply on the tables before them. These were the men who saw what he was, who lived in frustrated longing for his world—but tomorrow, if they saw him being murdered before them, their hands would hang as limply and their eyes would look away, saying, “Who am I to act?” . . . .

Dagny observed some faces—it took her an effort fully to believe it—who were looking at Galt with hatred. Jim was one of them, she noted. When the image of Mouch held the screen, these faces were relaxed in bored contentment, which was not pleasure, but the comfort of license, of knowing that nothing was demanded of them and nothing was firm or certain. When the camera flashed the image of Galt, their lips grew tight and their features were sharpened by a look of peculiar caution. She felt with sudden certainty that they feared the precision of his face, the unyielding clarity of his features, the look of being an entity, a look of asserting existence. They hate him for being himself—she thought, feeling a touch of cold horror, as the nature of their souls became real to her—they hate him for his capacity to live. Do *they* want to live?—she thought in self-mockery. Through the stunned numbness of her mind, she remembered the sound of his sentence: “The desire not to be anything, is the desire not to be.” (1124)

Dagny’s development culminates when, after the banquet, she hears Jim and others plotting to torture Galt:

She knew. She knew what they intended doing and what it was within them that made it possible. They did not think that this would succeed. They did not think that Galt would give in; they did not want him to give in. They did not think that anything could save them now; they did not want to be saved. Moved by the panic of their nameless emotions, they had fought against reality all their lives—and now they had reached a moment when at last they felt at home. They did not have to know why they felt it, they who had chosen never to know what they felt—they merely experienced a sense of recognition, since *this* was what they had been seeking, *this* was the kind of reality that had been implied in all of their feelings, their actions, their desires, their choices, their dreams. This was the nature and the method of the rebellion against existence and of the undefined quest for an unnamed Nirvana. They did not want to live; they wanted *him* to die.

The horror she felt was only a brief stab, like the wrench of a switching perspective: she grasped that the objects she had thought to be human were not. She was left with a sense of clarity, of a final answer and of the need to act. He was in danger; there was no time and no room in her consciousness to waste emotion on the actions of the subhuman. (1135)

From this moment on Dagny is in Atlantis. She runs, with her feeling of “weightless freedom,” to call Francisco. There is a moment of “blinding pain” in her office when she learns of the destruction of the Taggart Bridge (the very event that she had returned to the world to prevent) and as if by instinct seizes the telephone receiver. Placing the receiver back in its cradle is her first concrete action as a striker, and in taking it she gives up Taggart Transcontinental. Minutes later she stands “solemnly straight” and with Francisco and “the buildings of the greatest city in the world, as the kind of witnesses she wanted” takes the oath of Galt’s new

moral philosophy: “I swear—by my life and my love of it—that I will never live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for the sake of mine” (1138).

This had always been Dagny’s “own rule of living” (732), and *Atlas Shrugged* demonstrates that it is the rule each of us follows in “whatever living moments [we] have known” (1060). But few recognize that this is virtue, or understand how to implement it consistently. This is what Galt is the first to grasp and what Rearden and Dagny come to understand over the course of the novel. Only by coming to see the world in a new way—by learning a new philosophy—can they pronounce those words with the meaning Galt intended. Through the story of how these heroes discover Atlantis, the novel demonstrates this philosophy to us, its readers. In reading *Atlas Shrugged* we can ourselves follow the same complex process of reasoning and rethinking as do its heroes, moving from concretes to progressively broader, deeper, and more tightly integrated philosophical principles, which make it possible to understand that much of the pain, boredom, and despair felt by so many people is unnecessary and to achieve the “radiant state of existence” epitomized by Galt.

My aim in this essay was to call attention to this progression. Focusing on it enables one to better enjoy and appreciate the novel’s plot, to better learn from it, and to better understand its impact. Following this progression—working through the demonstration the novel gives of its philosophy and understanding how its conclusions apply to our own lives in a world where a strike of Galt’s sort would be impossible and improper—is too large a task for a single essay. Ultimately, it is something each of us must do for himself. I hope only to have provided some leads.

I leave you with Ayn Rand’s own advice, given during a question period in 1961, on how to implement Galt’s philosophical discovery in our social context:

Never take things literally when they are inapplicable; or rather, take them literally only when they apply literally. What do I mean by that? Well, in *Atlas Shrugged*, I show that men go on strike. So long as we have not yet reached the state of censorship of ideas, one does not have to leave a society in the way the characters did in *Atlas Shrugged*. One does not have to yet break relationships to a society. But you know what one has to do? One has to break relationships with the culture. Meaning, while you live in this society, break all cultural relationships—meaning, withdraw your sanction from those people, groups, schools, or theories which preach the ideas that are destroying you. . . . If you’ve read *Atlas Shrugged*, you will understand what I mean by the situation of the sanction of the victim. . . .

Now, what we have to do today: anyone who is serious about saving the world would have to first discard all the ideas—the entire cultural philosophy which is dominant today. Do not accept any of their ideas. Stand on your own as much as if you had to go into a separate valley, like in *Atlas Shrugged*. Stand on your own—your own mind. Check your premises. Define your convictions—define them rationally. Do not take anyone on faith, and do not believe that your elders know what they’re doing, because they don’t. You have to be the responsible creators of a new culture, if there is to be any culture. That is the sense in which *Atlas Shrugged* is applicable to our period. . . .

You may observe in the history of philosophy that all ideas change in various periods, but morality is the one realm that did not change; only its superficial forms changed. Men have always been taught that they have to live for

others, and they have to be sacrificial animals. . . . Break with the morality of altruism. Don't be afraid to assert *your* right to exist, but don't assert it as an arbitrary whim. [To succeed] you would have to know how to justify it, rationally and philosophically; and why you have that right. . . . When men drop all [the] ramifications of altruism, then you will see what a benevolent ideal society one could have; and America almost had it. The world came near to it at the end of the 19th century. . . .

You do not even know what a magnificent world America had. Now, it isn't fully gone, and it's in your power to build it again. But the retirement [into] which you have to go is cultural. Break with altruism and with every idea that is based on it. At least make the effort to think it out, very carefully. You'll be surprised how easy that revolution will be and how difficult it appears now [though] it isn't. Just give it one day's thought, and you'll have a different view. Now, I don't mean that that's all it will take. I mean, just give that to consider whether it's possible, after which you will have to do harder thinking than you've ever attempted before, because it will have to be totally on your own—totally relying on your own judgment and the logic of the arguments you hear or consider, rejecting all authorities, rejecting all bromides, and taking nothing on faith. But if you try it, you'll be surprised how close the Renaissance is to us, and it's up to each human being to work for it.<sup>25</sup>

In another context, Rand wrote that she did not know whether we would see a Renaissance in our time. "What I do know is this: anyone who fights for the future, lives in it today."<sup>26</sup>

## NOTES

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1. In this way Galt drives the action of the novel, and this is why Rand identifies him, rather than Rearden or Dagny Taggart, as the protagonist.

2. Ayn Rand, *For the New Intellectual* (New York: Random House, 1961; Signet paperback edition, 1963), 88. The full statement is: "The role of the mind in man's existence—and, as corollary, the demonstration of a new moral philosophy: the morality of rational self-interest." I discuss the novel's conception of the role of the mind in my other contribution to this volume, "*Atlas Shrugged on the Role of the Mind in Man's Existence*." The demonstration of a new moral philosophy is corollary to this in that the philosophy consists in *recognizing* the mind's role along with its presuppositions and consequences.

3. Ayn Rand, "Basic Principles of Literature," in *The Romantic Manifesto: A Philosophy of Literature* (New York: Signet, 1975), 81.

4. Ayn Rand, "The Psycho-Epistemology of Art," in *Romantic Manifesto*, 22.

5. Rand defined "plot" as "a purposeful progression of logically connected events leading to the resolution of a climax" ("Basic Principles of Literature," 82). This sort of relationship exists only when the characters' later actions are motivated by their understanding and evaluation of earlier events. In her lectures on fiction writing, Rand takes *Les Misérables* as the paradigm of a well-plotted novel because "everything [Jean Valjean] does is always conditioned by what he concluded (or misconcluded) from a previous event," and similarly for the antagonists (Tore Boeckmann, ed., *The Art of Fiction* [New York: Plume, 2000], 24).

6. See Tore Boeckmann's "What Might Be and Ought to Be: Aristotle's *Poetics* and *The Fountainhead*" in Robert Mayhew, ed. *Essays on Ayn Rand's The Fountainhead*.

7. Ayn Rand, "Art and Sense of Life," in *Romantic Manifesto*, 36.
8. Fiction functions as an extended hypothetical example or thought experiment.
9. When Directive 10-287 is being planned, twelve years into the strike, the bureaucrats are worried that they might encounter resistance because of a provision that would end freedom of the press (532–34, 545–46). This suggests that no such provision was in effect prior to this point.
10. David Harriman, ed., *Journals of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1997), 398.
11. See Ayn Rand, "The Cult of Moral Grayness," in *The Virtue of Selfishness: A New Concept of Egoism* (New York: New American Library, 1964).
12. The three parts, of course, are named for the three axioms of traditional logic, but there are reasons why each part has the name it does. For a more detailed discussion, see Onkar Ghate's "The Part and Chapter Headings of *Atlas Shrugged*" in the present volume.
13. Strictly speaking, on Rand's view, "existence," as an axiomatic concept, does not have a definition. See Ayn Rand, *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, second edition, Harry Binswanger and Leonard Peikoff, eds. (New York: Meridian, 1990), 40–41. Whether she had formulated this position at the time of writing Galt's Speech is unclear.
14. These shifts remain dramatic even if one factors out the novel's main philosophical speeches (i.e., those reproduced in *For the New Intellectual*) all of which occur in parts II and III. The statistics are as follows: in part I, there are on average 0.11 occurrences of "Moral" or "Evil" per page. In Part II they average is 0.38 occurrences per page (or 0.28 if the speeches are factored out), and in Part III the average is 0.83 (0.26 without the speeches). Unambiguously metaphysical words ("reality," "existence," "real," and "unreal") average 0.14 occurrences per page in part I, 0.22 occurrences per page in part II (whether the speeches are included or not), and 0.67 occurrences per page in part III (0.34 if the speeches are removed).
15. This is not the only paradox introduced in part I, which is aptly named "Non-Contradiction": Francisco d'Anconia, a boy who could not have become a worthless playboy, has nevertheless become one (116), and yet he does not act like one (199); Lillian, who clearly despises Rearden, nevertheless "wants him" in some inexplicable "non-material" sense (309); an invention of genius which is of immeasurable financial value, is abandoned to rust in the closed factory of a bankrupt motor company (289, 331); and, people who love their jobs and excel at them are abandoning them for menial positions (25, 64, 331). These paradoxes set the context for parts II and III of the novel. See Ghate, "Part and Chapter Headings."
16. There are also costs that Lillian knows and Rearden does not. As Francisco explains, Rearden's attendance constitutes a dangerous sanction of Taggart (415), and this is Lillian's actual motive for insisting that he escort her (398–99).
17. I discuss *Atlas Shrugged's* view of the nobility of material production in "Atlas Shrugged on the Role of the Mind in Man's Existence," 229–36. See also Debi Ghate's contribution to this volume, "The Businessmen's Crucial Role: Material Men of the Mind."
18. On the evil of this doctrine, see "Atlas Shrugged on the Role of the Mind in Man's Existence," 242–46.
19. Rand spoke often of what she called "the benevolent universe premise" (Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 425, 555, 557, 673, 710; Michael S. Berliner ed., *Letters of Ayn Rand* [New York: Dutton, 1995], 643), though she never used the phrase in the writings she intended for publication. For discussion see Peikoff, *Objectivism*, 342–44 and Allan Gotthelf, *On Ayn Rand* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth), 4–6, 94–96; and Allan Gotthelf and Gregory Salmieri in Gotthelf and Salmieri, eds., *A Companion to Ayn Rand* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016). Gotthelf discusses the premise as it bears on Dagny's characterization in particular in his "A Note on Dagny's 'Final Choice'" in the present volume.
20. Cf. "Atlas Shrugged on the Role of the Mind in Man's Existence," 242–44.
21. Eddie's response shows that, at this point in the novel, he understands the looters' motivation better than does Dagny. Galt ends his speech with a beautiful coda, directed primarily to Dagny, in which he explains how the depth of her own love of life makes it especially difficult for her to comprehend the nature and magnitude of villains' evil (1068).



22. In her essay “The Metaphysical vs. the Man-made,” in *Philosophy: Who Needs It* (New York: Signet, 1984), Rand discusses the widespread error of confusing unchangeable facts of reality with things made (and changeable) by men, and notes that often in political debates people proceed on the implicit premise that “men’s decisions are an absolute” and “reality’s demands are not” (45).

23. “*Atlas Shrugged* on the Role of the Mind in Man’s Existence” 236–39.

24. Those which it does are comparatively technical points concerning the nature of knowledge and the relations between the key concepts in ethics.

25. This material comes from the question period following Rand’s presentation of “Faith and the Force: The Destroyers of the Modern World” at the Ford Hall Forum in 1961. It has been printed, in an edited form, in Robert Mayhew, ed., *Ayn Rand Answers: The Best of Her Q&A* (New York: New American Library, 2005), 54. I quote here from a transcript of the event, rather than from the more polished published version, so as to retain the more personal and advice-giving character of Rand’s extemporaneous remarks. A recording of the event can be found online at [www.aynrand.org/site/PageServer?pagename=reg\\_ar\\_faith\\_and\\_force](http://www.aynrand.org/site/PageServer?pagename=reg_ar_faith_and_force) as part of the *Ayn Rand Multimedia Library*, a project of the Ayn Rand Institute. The relevant remarks are made in response to the first question, and I recommend listening to Rand’s answer in full.

26. *Romantic Manifesto*, viii.

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