

Galt's Speech in Five Sentences (and Forty Questions)¹

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[T]he range of what man can hold in the focus of his conscious awareness at any given moment, is limited. The essence, therefore, of man's incomparable cognitive power is the ability to reduce a vast amount of information to a minimal number of units—which is the task performed by his conceptual faculty.

—Ayn Rand, *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*²

INTRODUCTION

John Galt's Speech, as Onkar Ghate well explains in the preceding essay, has an "integral role . . . in the action and story of *Atlas Shrugged*."³ As Ghate relates, Galt announces to the world that he has taken the men of the mind on strike and explains the reasons and rightness of their strike.⁴ Galt ascribes the collapse of the world to the dominance and implementation of a philosophy that is in all respects *anti-mind*, and ascribes the recent acceleration of that collapse to the withdrawal of the strikers. And, to all those in his audience "who desire to live and to recapture the honor of their soul" (1066), he presents a rational view of existence and morality that is pro-mind and pro-life, he identifies the destructive essence of the dominant moral code and its underlying view of existence, and he calls on these men to make an unequivocal and uncompromising choice between the pro-life and the anti-life codes. For those making the pro-life choice, he offers knowledge of how to implement it and inspiration to do so, and urges them, also, to withdraw from the world, thereby avoiding any further harm to themselves and speeding the return of the strikers.

The speech, as Ghate makes clear, is, on Galt's part, both an act of justice to those left in the world who still deserve a rational statement explaining his and the strikers' action, *and* a crucial way of serving the aims of the strike. Moreover, I would add, it is an act that brings the strike to a climax. As Galt says, referring first to his own and Francisco's and Ragnar's early withdrawal and then to the speech he is now giving: "It was the three of us who started *what I am now completing*" (1060, my emphasis).⁵

A close study of the speech is as integral to a full understanding of the novel as the speech itself is to the novel's action. Because of the speech's wide-ranging philosophical content, however, its close study is also an invaluable source for the understanding of Rand's philosophic thought.⁶ But such a study is not easy. In this essay, then, I offer readers interested in

embarking on a detailed exploration of the speech some methods for doing so, and some key results of my own application of these methods.

We need well-defined methods for approaching any complex text. Without them, a reader retains only a vague sense of the whole, or a collection of discrete points that he cannot connect to one another. (This is why many readers fail to appreciate the role of the speech in the plot and some find it repetitive.) The problem is one we face whenever we are confronted with a wealth of information: because there are only so many units that a person can hold in his conscious mind at any moment, we are unable to comprehend the whole. But, as Rand states in the epigraph I have chosen for this essay, we have a way to deal with such cases—a way which is in fact essential to all successful human cognition. This method of condensation—of “unit economizing,” as Rand calls it—takes many forms; and because we can iterate it, condensing our condensations, there is no limit to what we can comprehend. The application of this method to a complex text is *outlining* or *summarizing*. The outline or summary makes it possible to see the structure of the whole and to relate any detail, no matter how fine, to it by relating it first to its proximate context, which we see then as playing a role in a wider context, and that in something yet wider, and so forth.⁷

So, in my first section, “Summarizing the Content, and Finding the Structure, of Galt’s Speech” I introduce a method of successive condensation of the speech, via the production of a series of increasingly shorter outline-summaries. Eventually I reach a summary some 600 words in length. One result of taking such a concentrated overview will be the discovery of explicit *transitions* in the speech from one broad focus to another, transitions that are for the most part clearly marked by Galt (and Rand). We will find four main transitions, and thus five main parts to the speech.

In the next section, that division into five parts will, with the help of further condensation, enable the formulation of the “Five Sentences” of that section’s—and this essay’s—title. I will offer confirmation of that division of the speech into five parts, and of my choice of summary statements for each part, by providing a (relatively brief) overview of some of the content and structure of each part.

Both to reconfirm such an analysis of the speech’s structure and to get a full mastery of its content, nothing of course can substitute for line-by-line study. In much of my teaching of philosophical and literary texts, I have long found it valuable, both for my students and for myself, to provide a series of *study questions* that isolate and highlight key features of the reading’s content and structure at a very fine grain. Working through such questions is an invaluable way of grasping and (if the questions are properly formulated) integrating the content.

I prepared such a set of study questions for the teaching of Galt’s Speech many years ago, grouped under the Five Sentences, and (with occasional revision) have used them time and again to great effect.⁸ So, I provide here a slightly edited version of those questions, in my third section, titled “Galt’s Speech in Forty Questions.”

The techniques for studying the speech that we will have explored to this point do not—of course—exhaust all the different ones one might use in a close study of the speech. In a coda to this essay’s presentation of the methods of condensation and study-question answering, I identify one more technique for focusing in on fundamental content of the speech, which my students and I have found both fascinating and rewarding to use, although in applying it I will leave John Galt to speak in his own words, and you to express the results of its use in yours.

SUMMARIZING THE CONTENT, AND FINDING THE STRUCTURE, OF GALT'S SPEECH

As a graduate student many years ago, I was struck by the value to readers, in certain older books, of the running capsule phrases in their margins, which capture the essential idea of a paragraph or two. So I decided to do the same for Galt's Speech in the (wide) margins of a hardback copy of *For the New Intellectual*. I then typed up, in continuous form, what I had written in my margins, converting phrases to summary sentences. Reading through the seven-page single-spaced summary that resulted, I found the structure and unity of the speech coming to life in my mind. So I did the same thing for those seven pages, and the resultant page and a half condensation of the speech was even more revealing. My next, and penultimate, stop was a half-page summary totaling 600 words (Galt's Speech is roughly 35,000 words).

Here is an example of the condensation process, applied to two consecutive paragraphs in the latter part of the speech, in which Galt is addressing those in the world who have not completely abandoned their desire to live (1052).

But to those of you who still retain a remnant of the dignity and will to love one's life, I am offering the chance to make a choice. Choose whether you wish to perish for a morality you have never believed or practiced. Pause on the brink of self-destruction and examine your values and your life. You had known how to take an inventory of your wealth. Now take an inventory of your mind.

Since childhood, you have been hiding the guilty secret that you feel no desire to be moral, no desire to seek self-immolation, that you dread and hate your code, but dare not say it even to yourself, that you're devoid of those moral "instincts" which others profess to feel. The less you felt, the louder you proclaimed your selfless love and servitude to others, in dread of ever letting them discover your own self, the self that you betrayed, the self that you kept in concealment, like a skeleton in the closet of your body. And they, who were at once your dupes and your deceivers, they listened and voiced their loud approval, in dread of ever letting you discover that they were harboring the same unspoken secret. Existence among you is a giant pretense, an act you all perform for one another, each feeling that he is the only guilty freak, each placing his moral authority in the unknowable known only to others, each faking the reality he feels they expect him to fake, some having the courage to break the vicious circle.

In the margin to the first paragraph, I wrote: You have never practiced or believed this morality.

In the margin to the second one, I wrote: You had no desire to be "moral"—but each of you faked it to the others.

Here is the full running summary I wrote for these two paragraphs and the ten that follow them:

You have never practiced or believed this morality. You had no desire to be 'moral'—but each of you faked it to the others. You now preserve the root of all your compromises: the belief that the moral and the practical are opposites; you see your choice as to be moral or to live. The result was to remove morality from life—and to view actual evils as practical. And when you are happy you feel guilt,

and pain you view as normal, believing evil to be potent since the moral is the practical. And so you believe that morality is a necessary evil. As a result of this false dichotomy, life is torn by impossible conflicts. It began when you discarded your mind. Reality is final, A is A. To say that you don't have to go to extremes is to reject identity, reason, and morality, is to be responsible for all the blood that is spilled in the world. Reality is an absolute. There is no middle—in any compromise between good and evil it is only the evil that can profit.

In the next ten paragraphs, Galt identifies further consequences for those torn between their desire to live and the morality of sacrifice they've accepted, including the loss of self-esteem, and the sense of betrayal of self. In the five paragraphs that follow, Galt offers an alternative. Here's the summary I provided for those five:

In childhood you knew the radiance of an independent, rational consciousness facing an open universe. I am only the man who chose consistently to be and live that way. That choice is the dedication to one's highest potential, and is made by realizing that the noblest act is choosing to think. Accept the fact that your life depends on your mind and that the responsibility of a rational consciousness is not to be evaded.

The full running summary for these twenty-seven paragraphs, including the portions of the summary already given, would be about twenty-five sentences long. The next condensation (which I no longer have) would be about eight sentences long and look as follows:

You don't practice or believe this morality, but you preserve its split between the moral and the practical, which is at the root of your doctrine of compromise. But compromise between good and evil, is an abandonment of the mind, in which only the evil can profit. Morality, to you, is duty, pain—a scarecrow waving away your pleasures. You abandon your mind, straddle every fence, surrender to mysticism, accept the muscle-mystics' claim to be the voice of reason. You blank out any evidence of the opposite, because you have tied your self-esteem to that mystic "unselfishness." Man's need of self-esteem is a volitional being's need to know his own value and his fitness for existence. It is your abandonment of your mind that has produced your fear and guilt, and a sense of self-betrayal. Reject your morality, reclaim your love of existence and of being a man. The choice is still open to you—the dedication to your highest potential, which requires grasping that thought is the noblest of acts.

In the final condensation, prior to the Five Sentences, the running summary of these twenty-seven paragraphs is *three* sentences long:

You will perish unless you reject this morality and its split between the moral and the practical, a split which leads you to the doctrine of compromise. You have tied your self-esteem to sacrifice, and thereby made your life unbearable. A glorious existence comes from dedication to the highest: to thinking.

Although, of course, important detail is lost in these successive condensations, one gains an increasing grasp of the whole. And with that grasp one can then return to a close study of those details, able now to relate them to the whole, and to hold them as part of that whole.

Now that we have seen an example of the condensation process, let's turn to the 600-word summary of the entire speech, which I produced just prior to producing the Five Sentences.

Summary

The state of the world is due to its moral code, which is anti-mind, anti-life: the code of sacrifice. We, the men of the mind, are on strike against it.

A morality of reason rejects the self-sacrifice of mystical and social ethics, and holds *man's life* as the standard of value. This morality is based on the axioms of existence, consciousness, identity, and a view of man's consciousness as *volitional*. Man possesses the choice to think or not to think, that is his basic choice, and the exercise of this power to think is his means of survival. The ruling values of this morality are: Reason, Purpose, and Self-Esteem. Rationality is its basic virtue, the other virtues are all expressions of this one; they are: Independence, Integrity, Honesty, Justice, Productiveness, and Pride. Happiness is the result of achieving rational values. Human relationships must be based on trade, with the initiation of force banished.

The code of sacrifice is the Morality of Death: it is based on the doctrine of Original Sin and the soul-body dichotomy. It attacks the mind, it attacks selfishness—all in the name of full sacrifice. The good of others is the standard, but those who are to be served are those who cannot earn the values you give them—the standard is *need*, an absence, a lack. Your motive, according to this code, should be *love*, love for those who have no value, love of the zero.

The teachers of this doctrine attack you through your fear of relying on your own judgment. They attack even the Law of Identity, to make their irrational Wish supreme. Their desire is to achieve the unearned, they want to take over the products of the mind, even while denying that the mind exists. They want to reduce man's mind to the level of a savage, yet to have him continue to produce—all in order to gain power, power over those consciousnesses to whom they have surrendered their own. They cannot harness nature, so they try to harness the mind by making the men of the mind feel guilty for their minds, and thus willing to exist in servitude. Their hatred of themselves, and their resentment against those who can survive as they cannot, results in a hatred of all of existence, a hatred of the good for being the good—and a longing for destruction. They do not want to live; *death*—their own and that of their victims—is their ultimate motive.

You will perish unless you reject this morality and its split between the moral and the practical, a split which leads you to the doctrine of compromise. You have tied your self-esteem to sacrifice, and thereby made your life unbearable. A glorious existence comes from dedication to the highest: to thinking, it comes from a proper standard of perfection, it comes from the fight for your rational happiness, and from your rejection of the doctrine of sacrifice. On this morality America will become a country of *rights* again, with a government whose purpose is solely to *protect* those rights. In a society which

leaves the men of superior intelligence free, everyone benefits. In the present society every rational man must and should go on strike, allowing it to collapse. Do not give up. Do not compromise. Fight for the value of your pride and your person, knowing that your code is the Morality of Life, and the source of every greatness that has ever existed. Reach the point where you can join us in the striker's oath, swearing by your life and your love of it, never to live for the sake of another man nor ask another man to live for yours.

Each of these sentences is the result of a separate condensation, and we can see that the sentences fall naturally into paragraphs. The paragraphing points to a structure.

In the first paragraph, the accelerating collapse of the world is attributed to a strike that Galt is leading of the men of the mind against the prevailing moral code of sacrifice with its damnation of the mind.

Then, in the second paragraph, the proper moral code, in the name of which the strikers are striking, a code which Galt calls "the Morality of Life," is presented. It is shown as resting on basic facts of man's nature, and certain axiomatic facts about reality and knowledge, which are explained. The code's standard of value is established, and its ruling values and basic virtues are identified. This presentation ends with a statement of the fundamental principles that should govern human interrelationships.

From there Galt moves, in the third paragraph, to an examination of the nature—and evil—of the morality the strikers are on strike against: the code of sacrifice. He identifies the view of man's nature—and of man's basic evil—that is at its base, and the contradictions inherent in that base. He analyzes the nature and shows the destructiveness of the code of sacrifice—its anti-mind, anti-life character—and condemns it as "the Morality of Death."

Galt then speaks, in the next paragraph of my summary, of the "teachers" (or "preachers") of this morality, identifying their deepest motives to be hatred and destruction, and not the love of man they sometimes profess. This section of the speech might be thought to be merely the culmination of the examination of the moral philosophy against which the strikers are on strike and not a part distinct from that examination. But that is a mistake. The distinction between the content of the code of sacrifice and the motivation of those who preach it (the mystics and the looters) is an important distinction within *Atlas Shrugged* as a whole, and because of this Galt (and Rand) intends the analysis of the content and inherent destructiveness of the code and the analysis of the psychology of its teachers as distinct parts of the speech.⁹

One way to underscore the difference of focus between the third and fourth parts of the speech is to consider the different status of their respective theses in Dagny's mind. Dagny is *never* tempted to accept a morality of sacrifice, but her fundamental conflict, and her refusal to go on strike, stem from the fact that she does *not* believe, until late in the novel, that the villains are motivated by death.¹⁰

Consider her exchange with Hugh Akston, when she explains her reason for leaving the valley:

"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?” said Hugh Akston softly. “Do they desire it? No, don’t answer me now. I know that the answer was the hardest thing for any of us to grasp and to accept. Just take that question back with you, as the last premise left for you to check.” (807)

We shall see further evidence for this division when we discuss shortly Galt’s explicit transitions from one part of the speech to the next. Let’s now continue with the summary, turning to its final paragraph.

Having identified hatred and destruction as the underlying motive of the mystics and looters, Galt is in a position to say to those in the world who still retain a desire to live that they must make a fundamental choice: either continue their acceptance of the teachings of those destroyers—and perish; or reassert their love of life, consistently accept the moral code he and his strikers live by. Having made this choice, he asks them to join the strikers by withdrawing from the world, thereby hastening the day of their return, and describes the kind of world that will now be possible—a world of reason, achievement, pride, and joy.

In short, then, the overall structure of the speech is as follows: The men of the mind are on strike against the morality of sacrifice. The proper morality is one of life and reason. The morality of sacrifice is a morality of death. Those who preach that morality are motivated by hatred and destruction. If you wish to go on living you must uncompromisingly reject those teachings and fully embrace the values of life and reason—the reward for which is a life of achievement and joy.

Transitions as a Guide to Structure

I said in the introduction that Galt (and Rand) for the most part clearly marks the transitions from one of these five parts of the speech to the next. Let us turn, then, to those transitions, for confirmation of this analysis into five parts (including the separation of the analysis of the morality of sacrifice from the analysis of the motivation of its teachers).

Galt opens the speech by attributing the collapse of the world to its practice of its moral ideal of sacrifice and its denial of the value of the mind, and he announces that he has accelerated that collapse by withdrawing the creative men of the mind. And then he says:

Your moral code has reached its climax, the blind alley at the end of its course.
And if you wish to go on living, what you now need is not to *return* to morality—you who have never known any—but to *discover* it. (1011)

The next three paragraphs support this by identifying the prevailing variants of the morality of sacrifice, the mystical and the social. The very next paragraph, which begins: “Man’s mind is his basic tool of survival” (1012), starts listeners on that journey of discovery. Galt is now presenting the facts of human nature on which his analysis of the basis of the concept of *value* in the concept of *life*, and the content of the Morality of Life, depend. That, then, is our first transition.

Having completed his presentation of his new concept of *morality*, and of its content and basis, with an analysis of the evil of the initiation of force (1023–24), Galt distinguishes between the life- and happiness-affirming motivation of the practitioners of his code and the “zero-

worshipping” motivation of those who would initiate force. The latter do not wish to live and, as he says to them, “only fear of death still holds you to the existence you have damned. You dart in panic through the trap of your days . . .” trying to evade the fact that “yours is the Morality of Death.”¹¹ Note what Galt says to them next:

Death is the standard of your values, death is your chosen goal, and you have to keep running, since there is no escape from the pursuer who is out to destroy you or from the knowledge that that pursuer is yourself. Stop running, for once—there is no place to run—stand naked, as you dread to stand, but as I see you, and take a look at what you dared to call a moral code. (1025)

And with this the transition to the third part of the speech is complete.

Galt’s analysis, through that third part, of the morality of sacrifice ends with a look at the attempt to justify sacrifice in the name of love:

The justification of sacrifice, that your morality propounds, is more corrupt than the corruption it purports to justify. The motive of your sacrifice, it tells you, should be *love*—the love you ought to feel for every man. A morality that professes the belief that the values of the spirit are more precious than matter, a morality that teaches you to scorn a whore who gives her body indiscriminately to all men—this same morality demands that you surrender your soul to promiscuous love for all comers. (1033)

The analysis continues for three more paragraphs, in the course of which Galt presents his own view of love (1033–34). Galt’s next two paragraphs begin, respectively, “Such is your morality of sacrifice” and “Such was your goal.” And then he says:

The degree of your ability to live was the degree to which you broke your moral code, yet you believe that those who preach it are friends of humanity, you damn yourself and dare not question their motives or their goals. Take a look at them now, when you face your last choice—and if you choose to perish, do so with full knowledge of how cheaply how small an enemy has claimed your life. (1034)

And from here on, for the next fourteen pages, the primary subject of Galt’s statements is “they,” not “you” as in the third part; he is now speaking of the teachers. The only exceptions are the places where Galt addresses those he has addressed in the third part in order to explain the errors and the evil of their teachers’ attack on the senses, reason, axioms, and causality, and the places where Galt sees those he is addressing as having accepted and put into practice those teachings. This contrast of pronouns is brought out dramatically in what I take to be the last sentence of this fourth part of the speech:

Death is the premise at the root of their theories, *death* is the goal of their actions in practice—and *you* are the last of their victims. (1047)

This sentence is followed with two paragraphs explaining that the strike has removed “the living buffers between you and the nature of your creed.” Then, with the words, “Twelve years ago, when I worked in your world, I was an inventor,” followed by a description of the motor he created, Galt initiates a narrative of the beginnings of the strike. He describes his discovery, “one night at a factory meeting,” where he was told that, precisely because of his superlative

achievement, he belongs to, and must serve, others, that “the enemy was an inverted morality—and that my sanction was its only power.” He saw that all he had to do was to say “No”—and so he did. “I quit that factory. I quit your world. I made it my job to warn your victims” (1047–48).

From here on, Galt makes clear that his listeners must make an unequivocal choice between his Morality of Life and the prevailing Morality of Death, he speaks of the rewards of choosing the former, offers guidance in making and consistently carrying out that choice, speaks of the only social order in which life and achievement are possible, identifying the nature and foundation of *rights*, and urges those who make the choice to value their lives to withdraw from the world themselves, thereby hastening the return of the strikers. This part, starting with the narrative of the beginning of the strike, has an evident unity as the final part of the speech, clearly distinct from the fourth part on the motivation of the teachers of the Morality of Death.

FIVE SENTENCES

The final step in the series of condensations that began with the seven-page summary of the speech is to crystallize for each of the five parts a one-sentence statement of the essence of its content. Here, with some slight editing, are the formulations I arrived at by working from the five paragraphs of the 600-word summary.¹²

- I. The world is perishing from the morality of sacrifice, and the men of the mind are on strike against this morality, which is speeding up the process of destruction (1009–11).
- II. The proper, rational morality for man is one of *life* and *reason*, based on the axiom that *existence exists* (1011–24).
- III. The morality of sacrifice is the morality of *death*, for it demands renunciation of that which makes life possible: the mind—and thus of any enjoyment of life on earth (1024–34).
- IV. This code is taught by men who, having renounced their minds, seek power over the consciousnesses of other men, by attempting to convince them to renounce their own minds and accept the morality of sacrifice; the deepest motive of these teachers of sacrifice is hatred of existence, of life, of man, of themselves—and their goal is to destroy their victims and themselves (1034–47).
- V. If all men who desire to live reject—as we the strikers have—these doctrines of mysticism and sacrifice, realizing that no compromise is possible, and refuse to support their destroyers, demanding instead a society of rights and freedom, then the society of the mystics and looters will perish, and we will come to have a world of reason, freedom, achievement, and joy (1047–69).

These five capsule statements, I submit, help one to see the overall structure and the unity of Galt’s Speech. By successive condensations of the speech we have successively increased our comprehension of the whole, precisely in accordance with the epistemic principle Rand has described in our epigraph (375).

With this overview of the speech’s structure in hand, we are ready to zoom in for a fine-grained, line-by-line analysis of the speech. I mentioned earlier the device I developed for this purpose: a focused set of study questions, grouped under the Five Sentences. Here are those study questions, so grouped.

GALT'S SPEECH IN FORTY QUESTIONS

I recommend first just reading through the questions in order; that by itself should illuminate the organization within each of the parts of the speech, and the flow of the argument across the whole. It should also make a subsequent effort of answering the questions one by one, ideally in writing, all the more rewarding.

I. The world is perishing from the morality of sacrifice, and the men of the mind are on strike against this morality, which is speeding up the process of destruction (1009–11).

1. The strike “granted you everything you demanded of us,” yet it hastened the process of destruction of the society. What does that reveal about the moral code against which the strikers are on strike? (1009–11).

II. The proper, rational morality for man is one of *life* and *reason*, based on the axiom that *existence exists* (1011–24).

2. The exposition of the Morality of Life falls, roughly, into three parts:
First (1012), certain basic facts about human nature are identified. Then (1012–15) the foundation of the morality is laid down, beginning with an analysis of the concept of *value*, showing it to rest on the concept of *life* (1012–13), then with a derivation of a standard of value from this (1013–15), and then with a statement of the metaphysical axioms and central epistemological tenets on which all this rests (1015–17). The third part or stage of the presentation is the specification of the content of the morality: the delineation of the “ruling values” and virtues (1017–21), the definition of happiness and its source (1021–22), and the identification of the basic social principle: the banishment of the initiation of force, or to put it positively, the acceptance of the principle of trade (1022–24).

This question and the next few questions follow that three-part structure. So, first: explain what Galt means by, and what his reasons are for asserting, the two statements that give the basic facts about human nature on which the Morality of Life depends: “Man’s mind is his basic tool of survival”; and: “Man is a being of volitional consciousness” (1012).

3. The two facts just discussed are distinctive to man. But there is one other fact about human nature that is crucially relevant—and this man shares with all living things: man is a *living* being. What does Galt mean by the statement (1012) that “the existence of life is not [unconditional]”?
4. How are the previous facts relevant to the concept of *value*? Present, in logical progression, Galt’s analysis of the concept of *value*, showing its dependence on the concept of *life*. Explain how it follows from this that for any living organism, its life is its standard of value. Then explain how the volitional character of man’s consciousness gives rise to the concept of *moral* values, and necessitates for man a code of morality.
5. Galt starts the presentation of the metaphysical and epistemological basis of the Morality of Life with the statement “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). What does Galt mean by the statement “existence exists”? What is meant

- by the statements: “Existence is Identity, Consciousness is Identification”? What is his definition of “reason”? Of “logic”? Of “reality”? Of “truth”?
6. Skipping ahead in the speech for a moment, what is an *axiom*? (1040) How is a statement which is an axiom shown actually to be an axiom? (1039–40). What is the fallacy of the “stolen concept”? (1039).
 7. What is the law of causality? (1037). What is its relationship to the axiom of Identity?
 8. Returning now to Galt’s presentation of the Morality of Life, why is “thinking . . . man’s only basic virtue”? (1017).
 9. What is the meaning of the statement, “My morality . . . is contained in a single axiom: existence exists—and in a single choice: to live” (1018). How is it dependent on that axiom? How is it dependent on that choice?
 10. Identify the “ruling values” of the Morality of Life, and describe each one in your own words (1018).
 11. What does Galt mean, on p. 1018, when he says “all his virtues pertain to the relationship of existence and consciousness”? Let’s approach this in stages, by examining each of the seven virtues Galt identifies: rationality, independence, integrity, honesty, justice, productiveness, and pride, as follows.
 - (i) Define and summarize each of the virtues, as presented on pp. 1018–21.
 - (ii) What is the significance of the fact that the account of each virtue begins with a sentence containing the words “is the recognition of the fact that”? To answer this, first (a) identify in each case what the relevant fact is, then (b) identify what all of these facts are facts *about*; then (c) identify how, as policies of action based on these recognitions, they *are* recognitions of those facts, then finally (d) return to the statement on p. 1018 with which this question began, and explain its meaning.
 - (iii) With your answers to (i)–(ii) as background, explain *why* Galt holds that each of the seven virtues he lists *is in fact* a *virtue*. Focus especially on how their status as a virtue is entailed by the choice to *live*.
 12.
 - (i) What is an emotion? What determines which emotion a person will experience in response to a situation? (1021–22).
 - (ii) What is Galt’s definition of “happiness”? (1014). What is its *source*, and what isn’t? (1022).
 - (iii) Discuss how the answers to (i) and (ii) are connected. In regard to this, explain the relationship between the successful pursuit of life (see again, Q. 10 above) and the achievement of happiness (Q. 12 [ii] just above).
 - (iv) Make use of your answers to (i)–(iii) to explain the fundamental distinction Galt makes on p. 1024 between motivation by joy (or love of life) and motivation by fear (or the avoidance of pain or death). Note how this serves as the transition to the examination of the morality Galt and his strikers reject: the prevalent morality of *sacrifice*, and to the analysis of it as a morality of *death* (1024–25, and see Sentence III, just below).
 13. Galt ends his presentation of the Morality of Life with the fundamental moral principles of human interaction. Why does he hold the principle of *trade* as the fundamental social principle, and the initiation of force as the fundamental evil in human interaction? (1022–24) In what way are they both—the advocacy of the

voluntary in human relations and the condemnation of the initiation of force—an expression of the fundamental virtue of *rationality*? (1022).

III. The morality of sacrifice is the morality of *death*, for it demands renunciation of that which makes life possible: the mind—and thus of any enjoyment of life on earth (1024–34).

14. Galt maintains that the morality of sacrifice starts from a damnation of man as evil, then builds from there (1025). “The name of this monstrous absurdity is Original Sin.” What is the doctrine of Original Sin? (1025). (Observe that Galt does not restrict the doctrine to the version of it taught by Catholicism.) What is its basic contradiction? (1025) What, according to Galt, is the actual moral status of that which it holds to be a sin? (1025–26).
15. What is the view of human nature that the morality of sacrifice is based upon? (Elsewhere it is called “the soul-body dichotomy”) (1026). In what way does this doctrine “negate man’s mind”?
16. What are the two doctrines that Galt ascribes to the “mystics of spirit” and “mystics of muscle”? In what way are they both advocates of the soul-body dichotomy (especially since the mystics of muscle deny the existence of mind)? Identify first the view of human nature of each, then the ethical view of each, then identify what these two doctrines have in common (1027). (Do you see in what way Christianity and Marxism are representatives of each, and in what way these categories extend beyond those particular teachings to label two broad *types* of view shared by various and sundry viewpoints?)
17. What is a “sacrifice”? Is *any* help to others a sacrifice? Why is actual sacrifice evil and fundamentally self-destructive? Why does it involve “sacrifice of the mind”? Can it rationally be maintained that one derives one’s happiness from sacrifice, as advocates of that ethics sometimes maintain? (1027–31).
18. What is the standard of the good in an ethics of sacrifice? Why does it divide mankind into “two enemy camps”? If selfishness is evil and sacrifice is good, why—and when—is it moral for the receivers of sacrifices to accept them? What, according to Galt, is the deeper meaning of such a code? (1030–33).
19. According to the code Galt is attacking, the justification of sacrifice is *love*. What *is* love, in fact, and what, then, is the meaning of the idea that you should love all human beings equally and *disinterestedly*? (1033–34).
20. Summarize (a) the fundamental metaphysical dichotomy underlying the morality of sacrifice (return to the initial summary on pp. 1026–27, second paragraph, for a better perspective now on its meaning), and its view of human nature and the consequent ethics); and (b) why this is “the morality of death,” according to Galt.

IV. This code is taught by men who, having renounced their minds, seek power over the consciousnesses of other men, by attempting to convince them to renounce their own minds and accept the morality of sacrifice; the deepest motive of these teachers of sacrifice is hatred of existence, of life, of man, of themselves—and their goal is to destroy their victims and themselves (1034–47).

21. What are the epistemological claims of the two schools of mystics? (1034–35). What are the metaphysical claims—that is what is it that they claim to perceive by higher means? (1035–36). What philosophical objections does Galt make to these

epistemological and metaphysical claims? (1034–35). What does he say is the *motive* for which they make such claims? (1035–36). Why is it ultimately “a desire not to be”?

22. “The nature of an action is caused and determined by the nature of the entities that act.” (1037) Explain. How is this formulation of the law of causality validated? In what way is the code of sacrifice—both the doctrine that one should give one’s wealth sacrificially and the doctrine that one should give one’s love sacrificially—an attempt to deny or evade the law of causality? (Compare Francisco’s analysis of the motivation behind the practitioners of promiscuous sex, in *Atlas* pp. 489–92.)
23. After reviewing your answer to Q. 6 above, identify each of the concepts or principles listed on pp. 1039–40 which cannot be rejected without violating the axioms, explaining why they cannot. Summarize Galt’s explanation of the validity of the senses (1040–41).
24. Summarize (a) Galt’s refutation of the mystics’ attack on (i) objective reality, (ii) the senses, (iii) reason; (b) his view of the consequences of accepting these attacks; and (c) his refutation of the denial of the existence and efficacy of the mind by the “mystics of muscle.” Why might one think that Marxism and Behaviorism, although not mentioned by Galt, are versions of the doctrines held by the “mystics of muscle”?
25. Summarize Galt’s analysis of the psychology of a mystic: how it develops, the nature of his psychological dependence on other consciousnesses, his need to dominate them, his consequent resentment and hatred of them, his desire to destroy them. (I’ve just given you a summary of the steps in the analysis; explain how each step follows from the preceding one) (1044–47).

V. If all men who desire to live reject—as we the strikers have—the doctrines of mysticism and sacrifice, realizing that no compromise is possible, and withdraw from the world, demanding instead a society of rights and freedom, then the society of the mystics and looters will perish, and we will come to have a world of reason, freedom, achievement, and joy (1047–69).

26. What role does Galt’s account of the beginnings of the strike (1047–48) play in his transition from part IV to part V of the speech?
27. What, according to Galt, is the role of the mind in production and survival (1047–49), and what does he mean when he says “I am the first man of ability who refused to regard it as guilt”? (1050). In what way has society regarded productive ability as a measure of guilt? (1049–50).
28. In what way does the morality of sacrifice lead to a split between the “moral” and the “practical”? How has this split led to a general cultural *amorality* (and a consequent *immorality* in practice)? (1053–54). Why do so many people “live without dignity, love without fire, and die without resistance”? State exactly what Galt means by each part of this statement, and then explain why he holds it to be true.
29. “There are two sides to every issue: one side is right and the other is wrong, but the middle is always evil.” Explain this statement, making use of the entire discussion of the philosophy of “compromise,” of “uncertainty,” and of “non-absolutes,” spawned by the absence of self-esteem (1054–55). Why does Galt

hold that “The man who refuses to judge, who neither agrees nor disagrees, who declares that there are no absolutes and believes that he escapes responsibility, is the man responsible for all the blood that is now spilled in the world.” What is Galt’s answer to the claim that “there are no absolutes”? (1054).

30. Galt explains that even though people see that the morality of sacrifice is responsible for the devastation and destruction around us, still they refuse to challenge and reject it. His explanation of this refusal is: “You blank it out, because your self-esteem is tied to that mystic ‘unselfishness’” (1056). Explain:
- (i) why man needs self-esteem (showing how this derives from man’s “free will”);
 - (ii) what self-esteem is and how it is acquired (making use also of the definition given on p. 1018, and the discussion of Pride, the virtue by which one acquires self-esteem, on pp. 1020–21);
 - (iii) what effect the lack of self-esteem has on a person’s general emotional state and perspective on the world;
 - (iv) what the consequences are of tying one’s self-esteem to living by a moral code which is in fact impossible to practice (1057–58).

Having answered (i)–(iv), go on now to give a unified explanation of Galt’s statement quoted at the beginning of this question.

31. One’s reaction to the first full paragraph on p. 1058 is a very private matter, and I will not ask anything specific about it, though I will ask you to explain each sentence of it to yourself.
32. Why, according to Galt, is it that “the noblest act you have ever performed is the act of your mind in the process of grasping that two and two make four”? Why is accepting this fact—if it is fully and consistently understood and accepted—“the dedication to one’s highest potential”? (1058).
33. What is Galt’s answer to the following statements?
- (i) “I’m afraid to trust my mind, I know so little” (1058).
 - (ii) “Man is imperfect” (1059—explain how he understands “moral perfection”; in this connection explain clearly the distinction between “errors of knowledge” and “breaches of morality”).
34. And what is Galt’s answer to these two statements?
- (i) “I can live without happiness” (1059).
 - (ii) “The morality you present is too hard to practice” (1060).
35. What, according to Galt, is a “right”? What is the meaning of the statement, “The source of man’s rights is not divine law or congressional law, but the law of identity”? For example, explain what rights does man have, according to Galt, and how Galt proves that we have such rights (1061–62).
36. Explain clearly Galt’s derivation of the right to property (1062).
37. What contribution to survival is made by the industrialist, and by any productive person of superior intelligence? Is the return such a person receives in a free society commensurate with his contribution? Explain (1063–65).
38. What is the nature of the betrayal that Galt attributes to people such as Robert Stadler? (1066).

39. What (i) practical and (ii) inspirational advice does Galt give to “those who desire to live”? In what other ways does Galt characterize these individuals? What future does he offer? (1066–68).
40. To whom is Galt addressing “the last of my words” (1068), and what is distinctive about what he says to them? To whom has he been speaking throughout the rest of the speech? (Review the entire speech to answer this. Is it the identical audience throughout? Compare Galt’s answer, 366 above, with your own.) To whom are the final four paragraphs of the speech addressed? Sum up in your own words what he says in those final paragraphs (1068–69).

CODA

Who is John Galt?—The Speech’s Own Answer

Atlas Shrugged opens with the question “Who is John Galt?” In a sense, the entire novel is an answer to that question, and if Galt’s Speech is a summation of that answer, it is perhaps fitting for us to close our study of the speech with the speech’s own, explicit multipart answer to that question. Note that immediately after Galt announces that he has taken over the airwaves, he begins the body of the speech with the words: “For twelve years, you have been asking: Who is John Galt? This is John Galt speaking.” His next sentence begins: “I am the man who . . .”—and thus begins his first statement of his own answer to that question. Across the speech, Galt refers to that question some five times, and provides some sixteen statements that begin with “I am the man who . . .” or something similar. The sixteen answers overlap in content, but are never fully identical, serving as they do in their specific contexts. But they are certainly consistent, providing us with different *facets* both of a deeply integrated speech and of a profoundly integrated person. These passages, then, need to be studied, first one at a time, identifying the precise meaning conveyed—and then as a whole, condensing the sequence of identified meanings into a single statement, much as, at the start of this essay, we discussed doing via successive condensations of the speech. This is a very difficult assignment, but the rewards are significant: a deeper understanding of the content of the speech, of the thought and the character of John Galt, of the role in *Atlas Shrugged* both of John Galt and of his speech, and of the thought and soul of the novel’s author.

As I mentioned in the introduction, however, I shall leave it to Galt to present his multifaceted answer to the question Who Is John Galt? in his own words, and to you, my reader, to produce a single, unified formulation of it in yours. (The emphases are my own.)

For twelve years, you have been asking: **Who is John Galt?** This is John Galt speaking. **I am the man who** loves his life. **I am the man who** does not sacrifice his love or his values. **I am the man who** has deprived you of victims and thus has destroyed your world, and if you wish to know why you are perishing—you who dread knowledge—**I am the man who** will now tell you. (1009)

You have destroyed all that which you held to be evil and achieved all that which you held to be good. Why, then, do you shrink in horror from the sight of the world around you? That world is not the product of your sins, it is the product and the image of your virtues. It is your moral ideal brought into reality in its full and

final perfection. You have fought for it, you have dreamed of it, and you have wished it, and I—**I am the man who** has granted you your wish. (1010)

Through centuries of scourges and disasters, brought about by your code of morality, you have cried that your code had been broken, that the scourges were punishment for breaking it, that men were too weak and too selfish to spill all the blood it required. You damned man, you damned existence, you damned this earth, but never dared to question your code. Your victims took the blame and struggled on, with your curses as reward for their martyrdom—while you went on crying that your code was noble, but human nature was not good enough to practice it. And no one rose to ask the question: Good?—by what standard?

You wanted to know **John Galt's identity**. **I am the man who** has asked that question. (1011)

Are you beginning to see **who is John Galt**? **I am the man who** has earned the thing you did not fight for, the thing you have renounced, betrayed, corrupted, yet were unable fully to destroy and are now hiding as your guilty secret, spending your life in apologies to every professional cannibal, lest it be discovered that somewhere within you, you still long to say what I am now saying to the hearing of the whole of mankind: I am proud of my own value and of the fact that I wish to live. (1021)

We, who were the living buffers between you and the nature of your creed, are no longer there to save you from the effects of your chosen beliefs. We are no longer willing to pay with our lives the debts you incurred in yours or the moral deficit piled up by all the generations behind you. You had been living on borrowed time—and **I am the man who** has called in the loan.

I am the man whose existence your blank-outs were intended to permit you to ignore. **I am the man whom** you did not want either to live or to die. You did not want me to live, because you were afraid of knowing that I carried the responsibility you dropped and that your lives depended upon me; you did not want me to die, because you knew it. (1047)

Did you want to know **who is John Galt**? **I am the first man of ability who** refused to regard it as guilt. **I am the first man who** would not do penance for my virtues or let them be used as the tools of my destruction. **I am the first man who** would not suffer martyrdom at the hands of those who wished me to perish for the privilege of keeping them alive. **I am the first man who** told them that I did not need them, and until they learned to deal with me as traders, giving value for value, they would have to exist without me, as I would exist without them; then I would let them learn whose is the need and whose the ability—and if human survival is the standard, whose terms would set the way to survive. (1050)

Some of you will never know **who is John Galt**. But those of you who have known a single moment of love for existence and of pride in being its worthy lover, a moment of looking at this earth and letting your glance be its sanction, have known the state of being a man, and I—**I am only the man who** knew that

that state is not to be betrayed. **I am the man who** knew what made it possible and who chose consistently to practice and to be what you had practiced and been in that one moment. (1058)

NOTES

1. With the kind permission of Wiley-Blackwell, this essay draws on material from my chapter “Galt’s Speech and the Philosophy of Objectivism” that will appear in *Ayn Rand: A Companion to Her Works and Thought*, Allan Gotthelf and Gregory Salmieri, eds. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, forthcoming). A good deal of the material in the present essay goes back to my preparation for a workshop on the Objectivist ethics I gave in New York City in 1967 (on which see further in n. 12 below); and a portion was developed in connection with my frequent teaching of the novel in courses at The College of New Jersey (formerly Trenton State College). Most of this teaching was done in an honors course on “Human Love in Philosophy and Literature” that I cotaught biennially, across some twenty years, with James Brazell of the college’s English department. I offer my deep gratitude to Jim and to our many students, for the wonderful teaching (and learning) experiences the course provided me; it was truly one of the long-term personal highlights of my teaching career. (One of our former students, Gregory Salmieri, as it happens, is a contributor to this volume.) In this essay I have made good use of other essays in the present volume, and recorded lectures, by Onkar Ghate, Shoshana Milgram, and Greg Salmieri. I also thank Greg and Mary Ann Sures for extensive and valuable comments on a previous draft.

2. Expanded second edition, eds. H. Binswanger and L. Peikoff (New York: Meridian, 1990), 63.

3. “The Role of Galt’s Speech in *Atlas Shrugged*,” above, 363.

4. For the meaning in *Atlas Shrugged* of the phrase “the men of the mind,” see Gregory Salmieri’s essay above, “*Atlas Shrugged* on the Role of the Mind in Man’s Existence,” 219–21.

5. Ghate also discusses, with great insight, why, for such a strike to be possible, Galt must be a man of genius, and how only an achievement such as the speech can show that, and thus, from the standpoint of the success of the novel in creating both a convincing story line and in exemplifying its basic theme, why the speech, in full, must be present. It is arguable whether Ghate’s argument by itself establishes a need for a speech of this length (viz. some three hours [1071, 1100] and some sixty pages). But that argument, together with the sort of close analysis of the speech’s content and progression we are about to embark on, in my view certainly does.

6. On the relationship between Galt’s Speech and Rand’s philosophic system, which she came to call “Objectivism,” see her preface to *For the New Intellectual: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* (New York: Random House, 1960), vii–viii, and my discussion in the chapter on Galt’s Speech in *Ayn Rand: A Companion to Her Works and Thought* (above, n. 1). Also useful in this connection are Onkar Ghate’s essay on Galt’s Speech just above and Gregory Salmieri’s discussion of *Atlas Shrugged*’s particular character as a *philosophical* novel, in his “Discovering Atlantis,” esp. 399–403 and 442–43 below. (Salmieri’s other contribution, on the wide-ranging character of the novel’s theme, “*Atlas Shrugged* on the Role of the Mind in Man’s Existence,” is relevant as well, as are several other contributions to this volume.)

7. My gratitude to Greg Salmieri, who helped me to formulate the connection between this essay’s epigraph and the method of condensation I am recommending here. For further discussion of the epistemic significance of the principle of unit-economy, see Rand, *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, chapter 7; Gotthelf, “Ayn Rand on Concepts: Another Approach to Abstraction and Essence,” unpublished; and Salmieri, “The Objectivist Epistemology,” in *Ayn Rand: A Companion to Her Works and Thought* (above, n. 1).

8. See n. 1 above.

9. Here I take issue with Onkar Ghate’s analysis of this part of the speech (above, 1, 363).

10. For an excellent discussion of this issue, see Salmieri, “Discovering Atlantis,” 435–49 below.

11. Witness the life of James Taggart—and recall what Galt says to him, in the torture room, when this fact about himself breaks into Taggart’s consciousness, and Taggart moans “No . . . No . . .” (1146):

“Yes,” said Galt.

He saw Galt's eyes looking straight at his, as if Galt were seeing the things he was seeing.
"I told you that on the radio, didn't I?"

12. The draft typescript for my presentation on Galt's Speech in my 1967 workshop on the Objectivist Ethics (n. 1, above) included a five-statement outline (very close to the Five Sentences I use in this essay). Ayn Rand kindly agreed to read and comment on the entire draft before the class met. In a memorable meeting in her apartment that summer, she read through the typescript, marking with her typical backwards-checkmarks places where she had comments to make. When she was done, she looked up with a smile and said, "You've got it." To the five-statement summary of Galt's Speech she had one correction, to the fourth statement, the validity of which I could see immediately and incorporated into my typescript. (I no longer recall the precise point she made.) With the rest, she was in agreement. In recounting this, I do not mean to imply that the five-part structure I identify in this essay, and the way I formulate the essential content of each part, is the way Rand herself identified the structure and content when she prepared the speech or the way she would have done so had she herself taken on in 1967 the task of reoutlining the published speech. But I do want to report, for the historical record, my recollection of her approval, for public presentation, of my account of the basic structure and content of the speech. Readers should in any case work through my account on their own, comparing it, and the evidence in the speech I provide for it, with the speech itself—and should ideally prepare their own outline, as I have done mine. In the essay on which the present one is based (above n. 1), I briefly discuss the evidence for the content of Rand's own outline(s) during the writing of the speech, as that is available in her journal notes; meanwhile, see Shoshana Milgram's discussion of this topic (above, 53), and the passages she refers to in David Harriman, ed., *Journals of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1997). Readers can also compare the full outline of the speech that Gregory Salmieri—building in part as he says (467) on my analysis of the speech and in part on lectures by Onkar Ghate—provides in an appendix to the present volume.