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Needs of the *Psyche* in Ayn Rand's Early Ethical Thought

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After all, any form of swift physical annihilation is preferable to the inconceivable horror of a living death. And what but a rotting alive can human existence be when devoid of the pride and the joy of a man's right to his own spirit?

—Ayn Rand, Letter to John Temple Graves, July 5, 1936¹

In her 1964 essay collection *The Virtue of Selfishness*, as well as in her 1957 novel *Atlas Shrugged*, Ayn Rand presents the ethical theory for which she is today well known.² The theory developed in stages over several decades, as Rand worked through a range of questions concerning the foundations and substantive content of ethics. My interest here is in the earliest stages in this process of development, from shortly after she immigrated to the United States from the Soviet Union, in 1926, through the publication in Great Britain of the first edition of *Anthem*, in 1938.

This period offers a wealth of material to consider, and one can see many key aspects of Rand's mature ethical thought beginning to take shape. I will concentrate on one main issue: the earliest antecedents of her innovative later views regarding the foundations of ethics. Rand later held that values, in the broadest sense of the term, were grounded in the survival needs of living organisms, and that specifically *ethical* values were grounded in a distinctive (survival-related) need of human beings for a framework of abstract principles by which to guide their action. Even in the late 1930s, Rand remains many steps away from a complete formulation of this theory and its supporting arguments, for which she will have to rely on views about the epistemology of ethics that she does not reach until the 1940s and 1950s. But from very early on, she is convinced that human life gives rise to needs—in particular, to what might be called needs of the *psyche* or *spiritual needs*—that form the basis of ethical norms. I will chart the emergence of this view in Rand's writings prior to *Anthem*, and then explore her use of it, in *Anthem*, to structure the course by which her protagonist, Equality 7-2521, gradually re-orient himself toward an ethics of egoism from one of collectivist self-denial.

The discussion that follows is selective and somewhat episodic. I omit much of Rand's early corpus, including much that a full account of the development of her ethical thought would have to cover. I also make almost no attempt to relate her thought to that of other philosophers, although there is much to be said here, especially in regard to her relation to Greek ethics and to Nietzsche. I do, however, bring into focus aspects of Rand's early ethical thought that may not be apparent at first but that can help us better understand both the ethical vision of *Anthem* and Rand's mature views. I deal with the latter briefly at the conclusion of the essay.

NORMS FOR LIVING: *THE SKYSCRAPER*, *THE LITTLE STREET*, AND “THE HUSBAND I BOUGHT”

Let us start by looking at three early fiction-writing projects undertaken by Ayn Rand in the late 1920s. My aim is to elicit from these an initial conception of the nature and source of ethical norms, a conception whose development I then follow, in schematic form, up through the publication of the first edition of *Anthem*.

One of the first projects Rand worked on in America (as a screen writer for Cecil B. DeMille) was a scenario for a movie about the construction of a skyscraper. In her working notes for the scenario (entitled *The Skyscraper*), which date from 1927, she describes what the movie should show:

The *effort* of the building, the construction—all the details of that effort.
The types, what they do, what happens to them and so on. . . .
 “*Achievement is the aim of life.*”
 Life is achievement. . . .
 Achievement—give yourself an aim, something you *want to* do, then go
after it, breaking through everything, with nothing in mind but your aim, all will,
all concentration—and *get it*.³

From an ethical perspective, what is of particular interest here is the statement that “Achievement is the aim of life.” How should we understand this? Taken as a description of how people live, it is false, for clearly achievement is not everyone’s aim, nor even necessarily *most* people’s aim. Rand would have acknowledged as much; her view, during the period when she wrote the above notes, was that people rarely had achievement as their aim.⁴ At best, we would have to say that achievement is an aim that some people have and others lack, but “some people seek achievement—therefore achievement is the aim of life” hardly seems a promising inference. It is not immediately clear, therefore, what to make of Rand’s claim about achievement. How can it be the case that the aim of life is achievement, if achievement may well be the farthest thing from most people’s minds most of the time?

The possibility is not as anomalous as it might seem. There are many things that are true of “human life” that are not true of every individual human life or even necessarily of most human lives. Consider the statement “Man ingests food through his mouth and walks on two legs.” The statement is true, even though not every human being can do these things; and even if a great many people could not do these things, it would not *thereby* follow that the statement was false. When we generalize about human life in these instances, we set aside cases of defect and disease. “Man walks on two legs” does not mean “All men walk on two legs” with the quantifier “all” ranging over every member of the species. It is a statement about human life in its non-defective and non-diseased instantiations, about human life *as such*. Thus we can say that it is in the nature of human life that man walks on two legs, even though some men do not. Seemingly paradoxically, in cases of this kind, we generalize about “human life”—and can only do so—by deliberately excluding some instances of that life from consideration. The same is true throughout the biological study of human life, and throughout all biological study, insofar as it is concerned to characterize the human or any other life form.⁵ There is a precedent, therefore, for the idea of generalizing about human life *as such* from a restricted class of cases.

The analogy to biological generalization suggests that Rand's claim about achievement has a *normative* dimension, because biological generalizations themselves have a normative dimension. The statement "Man ingests food through his mouth and walks on two legs" tells us how things are when they are as they *ought to be* with a member of the human species. If a particular person is unable to do these things, we conclude that things are not right with him; that there is some defect preventing him from functioning properly. If we were to adopt a parallel understanding of the statement about achievement, we would take it to entail similar conclusions about someone who did not seek to achieve anything.⁶ We would understand the statement about achievement as a *normative* claim, presenting achievement as the *proper* (or, at least, as a *proper*) aim of life. This, I think, is how the statement should be understood, notwithstanding its descriptive-looking surface grammar. Rand is describing how a person ought to live, not how people actually live⁷; a human life, she is saying, ought to be a life dedicated to the concentrated, determined pursuit of self-chosen goals.

What, then, is the basis of Rand's normative claim? What is the source of the norm she advances here? She restates the claim to read that "Life is achievement." This suggests that the norm about achievement is grounded in the nature of human life itself; that in some sense life by its very nature "demands to be" a process of achievement.⁸ On this view, it is possible to derive norms for what a human life should be—for how such a life should go—from facts about what it is. There is no need to suppose that such norms are imposed on life from the outside, as it were, by some distinct source of normative authority such as the will of God, the Form of the Good, or the conventions of society.⁹ But the nature of such norms seems puzzling. How could an examination of human life itself lead to the conclusion that achievement is its proper aim, or one of its proper aims? One can certainly find individuals in real life who—like the heroes of *The Skyscraper*—do make achievement their aim. However, it is not immediately clear what pointing to such individuals accomplishes, beyond confirming an unsurprising fact—that some people seek achievement. What we are looking for is a norm concerning what everyone should seek, and the identification of a sub-class of achievement-oriented human beings would seem to put us no closer to establishing any such norm. In order to establish that "achievement is the aim of life," we would need grounds for regarding the lives of these achievement-seekers as normative for all human lives. Moreover, our grounds for so regarding them would need to be drawn from facts about the human life process itself, rather than from anything external to that process, if the norm about achievement were to have the requisite sort of "internal" justification.

Our previous examples are again instructive, as a model of the kind of norms we need and how they might be grounded. When we say that there is something the matter with a person who cannot ingest food through his mouth—something the matter with the person's health—our reason is neither that ingestion by mouth is what God wills, what society expects, nor what is good in some abstract, Platonic sense, but rather that the impairment of this capacity impairs a person's ability to live at all. It is in this sense that our reasoning appeals to the nature of the human life process itself; the process, we say, is of such a nature that its continuation is hampered or threatened when the capacity for oral ingestion of food is impaired. Similar points would apply to other norms of physical health. Broadly speaking, these norms have the same sort of foundation in the nature of human life that Rand appears to be claiming for the norm about achievement.¹⁰

How, then, might an attempt to ground the norm about achievement in facts about human life go? As in the preceding examples, there would have to be facts about human nature in virtue of which a life not focused on achievement was hampered or threatened. Presumably these

would be facts of a rather different kind from the facts about human physiology on which our judgments in the preceding examples would be based. Even if there were some kind of connection between the lack of a commitment to achievement and ill-health, Rand's point in the above passage is surely not that those who do not seek to achieve anything suffer from ill-health. She is presenting achievement not as a means to health but, in some sense, as what life is all about. If there is some defect in those who do not seek to achieve anything, it is not (as far as Rand is concerned) a health defect but a defect in the way they view and conduct their lives. We might call it a defect within the *psyche* or the *soul*, a defect that is *spiritual* rather than physical, in a wholly naturalistic sense of all three of these terms. Rand (who was an atheist) uses the term "spiritual" throughout her writings, to refer to that which concerns our conscious lives, and so I will follow that usage here in characterizing her views.¹¹ In order to ground the norm about achievement in facts about human nature, then, we would have to show that features of our conscious lives can either facilitate or hamper our ability to go on living and, on that basis, draw a distinction between (as I will say) spiritual well-being and deficiency. Spiritual well-being might then turn out to depend on, or to be partly constituted by, a commitment to seeking achievement, and the condition of the spiritually well-off individual (this commitment included) could be taken as normative for the species as a whole.¹²

The passage on achievement gives us Rand's view of the general form that a spiritually well-off human life will take, in one aspect at least. It will be a life characterized by the concentrated and determined pursuit of self-chosen goals. We can take this passage as Rand's first pass at characterizing spiritual well-being. In later writings, she will enrich and refine this characterization, and she will make her reliance on an analogue of the distinction between health and disease more explicit. For evidence of both trends, we can turn to one of her next projects.

In 1928, Ayn Rand made notes for a novel (never completed) that was to be entitled *The Little Street*.¹³ The novel's theme was to be "The tragedy of a man with the consciousness of a god, among a bunch of snickering, giggling, dirty-story-telling, good-timing, jolly, regular fellows." Here is part of her description of the "regular fellows," that is, average people:

Show *that humanity is utterly illogical*, like an animal that cannot connect together the things it observes. Man realizes and connects much more than an animal, but who can declare that his ability to connect things is perfect? The future, higher type of man will have to perfect just this ability [to achieve] the clear vision. A clear mind sees things *and* the connections between them. Humanity is stumbling helplessly in a chaos of inconsistent ideas, actions, and feelings that can't be put together, without even realizing the contradictions between them or their ultimate logical results.¹⁴

In part, this passage describes average people as they seemed to Rand in this period.¹⁵ But it also does something more, as the reference to "the higher type of man" indicates. The passage provides further elaboration of Rand's conception of (what I have called) spiritual well-being and deficiency and, thus, expresses a norm for human life. The spiritually deficient individual gropes around in an intellectual chaos produced by his failure or inability to make connections among the things he observes. By contrast, the spiritually well-off individual is concerned to make logical connections, to eliminate contradictions from his thinking, and to act on the basis of a clear understanding of the "ultimate logical results" of his "ideas, actions, and feelings." This adds to the previous characterization of spiritual well-being in terms of the

commitment to achievement. Spiritual well-being now depends both on the commitment to achievement and on the formation and maintenance of an integrated worldview.¹⁶

But what shows that this is what spiritual well-being involves, or that there is any objective distinction between well-being and deficiency in this area? It is easy enough to draw distinctions between “higher” and “lower” modes of life. But it is not sufficient merely to draw such distinctions; the *way* in which we draw them needs to be justified, if the norms we expect the distinctions to support are to have any claim to objectivity. For all we have said so far, the distinction between spiritual well-being and deficiency might be arbitrary or based only on an esthetic preference for certain modes of life over others. If this distinction is to support norms whose objectivity rivals that of the norms of physical health, there must be something in the nature of human life that requires us to consider certain instances of that life to be diseased or defective. I have already suggested what this is, drawing on the analogy to health. What must be shown is that there can be features of a person’s conscious life that hamper or threaten his ability to go on living. Does Rand hold such a view of the characteristics she regards as forms of spiritual deficiency? She does, beginning in the notes for *The Little Street* and continuing, with various additions and modifications, throughout all her subsequent fiction and much of her nonfiction. In this essay, I can canvass only a small selection of this material, mostly restricted to Rand’s early writings. I begin by looking further at the notes for *The Little Street*.

Let us consider two passages describing, respectively, the protagonist of the novel, Danny Renahan, and the majority of people (in the novel and in real life). Here is Rand’s description of Danny Renahan:

He realizes that he is living, he appreciates every minute of it, he wants to *live* every second, he is unable to *exist* as other men do. He doesn’t take life for granted and live as he happens to be living—just calm, satisfied, normal. For him, life [must be] strong, high emotion; he has to live “on top,” “breathing” life, tense, exalted, *active*. He cannot spend eight hours each day on work he despises and does not need. He cannot understand men spending their lives on some work and not liking that work, not doing with it what they please. . . .

He doesn’t have people’s attitude toward life, that is, the general way of existing calmly day to day and [experiencing] something strong and exalting only once in a while, as an exception. “*Everyday life*” *does not exist for him*. His normal state is to be exalted, all the time; he wants *all* of his life to be high, supreme, full of meaning.¹⁷

There follows a description of the majority of people:

They do not hold anything to be very serious or profound. There is nothing that is sacred or immensely important to them. There is nothing—no idea, object, work, or person—that can inspire them with a profound, intense, and all-absorbing passion that reaches to the roots of their souls. They do not know how to value or desire. . . . They are too small and low for a loyal, profound reverence—and they disapprove of all such reverence.¹⁸

The first of these passages gives us a new way of characterizing the difference between the “higher type of man” and other men. The higher types *live*, whereas the others merely *exist*. What does this distinction come to? As the two passages together show, the general contrast is between activity and passivity. Those who merely “exist” fail to become fully engaged in life;

though they presumably take some action, they are inactive in important respects. The second passage sums up the essential nature of their inactivity in the statement that such people “do not know how to value or desire.” “Valuing” suggests a conceptual appraisal whereas “desiring” suggests an affective response, and Rand’s description suggests that both are involved in the state of being she calls “living.” “Living” involves *holding* things sacred—whether an “idea, object, work, or person”—and being inspired with *passion*.¹⁹

Rand has now further expanded her conception of spiritual well-being and spiritual needs. Spiritual well-being now involves “knowing how to value and desire,” as well as seeking achievement and maintaining an integrated worldview. Values and desires, in turn, are a spiritual need; those who lack them are spiritually deprived. Thus, as Rand now says, they “exist” but do not “live.”

Rand’s use of the distinction between “living” and “existing,” in the first of the passages we have been considering, suggests that she does indeed believe that there can be features of a person’s conscious life that hamper or threaten his ability to live, and that she does indeed mean to base her judgments of spiritual deficiency on the requirements of sustaining life. But let us be careful. To read Rand in this way requires us to ascribe literal content to the distinction between “living” and “existing”; it requires us to view this distinction as more than a metaphor. Can the distinction be viewed in this way? It seems to me that it can. The “life” of any living organism consists in a (generally variegated, multifaceted) process of action performed by and/or occurring within the organism. In the short run, at least, the process is not an all-or-nothing proposition: it can be carried on incompletely, with some of its elements either not occurring or occurring in a weakened form. Where the process is significantly impaired, there is a literal sense in which, to the extent of its impairment, the organism is “not living,” even though it is also not yet dead. And this, I suggest, is how we should read Rand’s statement above. Her point is that there is a significant gap in the life-functions of the non-valuing, non-desiring types of people. They drag on, like a drooping plant deprived of water, but the life process has been compromised.

Understood in this way, the living-existing distinction suggests a structural analysis of spiritual deficiency in terms of the suspension or impairment of certain necessary life-functions. The life-functions in question must be ones that we carry on through our conscious lives—that is to say, through thought, affect, and action—rather than functions performed automatically by our bodies, such as cell nutrition or blood circulation. The suspension or impairment of any of these needed life-functions would constitute a form of spiritual deficiency.²⁰ This account implies that what would have to be shown, in order to justify a distinction between spiritual well-being and defect, is that there are certain life-functions—beyond those in terms of which we conceptualize health and disease—that are *necessary* for us. How, then, might this be shown? What kind of necessity are we dealing with here?

The life-functions that sustain health are necessary in the sense that their impairment has costs for a living organism’s ability to function at all, that is, to remain in existence as a living thing. For example, the prolonged absence of liver function in human beings will eventually shut down all the other physiological systems and processes that, at the physiological level, make up the life of a human being. Liver function is necessary because its prolonged absence results in physical collapse and death. For humans and some other animal species, physical malfunctions also generally carry, at some point or other, the more immediate cost of physical pain. Now we have already said that Rand is not advancing the norm about achievement, or by parallel other norms of spiritual well-being, as norms of health. So we should not expect to find physical pain

or physiological breakdown among the direct costs of spiritual deficiency. But if forming an integrated worldview, valuing and desiring, and striving for achievement are necessary life-functions for a human being, then there should be *some* clear costs to our lives in neglecting these activities. Spiritual deficiency should have some negative bearing on our ability to live.

One kind of cost might involve our ability to satisfy *material* needs, needs for food, shelter, transportation, and so forth. The disorientation and passivity of “existing” without “living” would assuredly make the satisfaction of these needs vastly more difficult (if not impossible), especially if writ large on a broad social scale, since it would deprive us of most of the discoveries and innovations on which we rely in order to satisfy them. Scientific knowledge and technological advancement require just the sort of active-mindedness, dedication to values, and commitment to achieve that Rand associates with “living” and with spiritual well-being. The material costs of spiritual decline will be a central theme of *Atlas Shrugged* and a prominent theme in *We the Living* and in *Anthem*. In her earliest work, however, Rand stresses not the material but the psychological costs of spiritual deficiency. Her notes for *The Little Street* suggest that, at the limit, the destruction of spiritual well-being is marked by emotional suffering and what we might call “spiritual collapse,” that is, the psychological collapse of one’s ability to think, choose, and act.

Let us consider, in this connection, two passages from the notes. The first describes one of the minor characters in the novel:

A genius gone wrong. A handsome, brilliant young actor with a fine mind and a beautiful soul. Famous and successful, but gone wrong in that he is genuinely unhappy; his life is empty of desires or interests; he is cynical, tired, disgusted with everything—inside. Outside—he leads a wild life full of vice. He is not clear to himself, there is a continual chaos in his mind, regarding himself and the world. He does not know what he lives for or why he lives. *He does not care*—in an immense sense. An example of a fine frame that the little street has filled with its rotten content. Instinctively, he does not accept [the little street’s view of life], he revolts against it—but he has no other. And it is too late for another. He shows how empty the little street’s ideals are and what a wreck they make of an exceptional being. For they can’t fill such a soul and they do not permit the [ideals] that could fill it. He is utterly cynical and does not believe in anything. He could not accept the little street’s beliefs; they only killed in him all belief in believing.²¹

The second passage describes Hetty, the woman in love with Danny. By the end of the story, Danny has been convicted of the murder of a famous pastor, apparently a kind of Nietzschean ascetic priest who, motivated by a hatred of strength and happiness, had used his influence to ruin Danny’s life and career.²² Here is the description of Hetty, both in general and in the aftermath of Danny’s conviction:

A clear, *straight* soul. . . . Very sensitive. Lonely. Not a strong, ambitious career woman, but—a woman. Bewildered by life. Unable to adapt herself to things as they are. In the end, left aimless, with nothing to live for and a terror of living—showing how empty a place this world is for one who does not and cannot share its vices and vicious virtues.²³

Hetty and the actor both have attributes of spiritual well-being, but they both also lack the strength of mind to resist the spiritually destructive effects of their social environment—an environment dominated by the types of people described earlier, who hold no meaningful values, take nothing seriously, and, in some cases (such as that of the pastor whom Danny kills) are motivated by a desire to destroy greatness. We consequently see both in Hetty and in the actor evidence not just of spiritual deficiency but of spiritual collapse, the inability to go on functioning as thinkers and agents. The actor is unhappy, has no desires or interests, is tired and cynical, outwardly wild and out of control, inwardly in a state of mental chaos. He has lost all concern for his life. Hetty, left without Danny, is aimless and terrified, with no further values to live for. These examples show that, for Rand, the etiology of spiritual collapse can have a social component; Hetty's and the actor's problems are not self-made but derive from the social conditions in which they find themselves. The social world has made it impossible for them to make sense of their lives and to sustain the deep reverence for values that each had inwardly been capable of. The examples show, also, the kinds of costs Rand would point to in order to justify the view that the lack of values, the failure to seek achievement, and the failure to bring order to one's observations and experiences are human defects. The costs Hetty and the actor bear are extreme; Rand need not claim that every spiritual defect unavoidably brings on spiritual collapse, any more than we would expect every physical ailment to cause death.²⁴ Presumably, however, she would also want to count less extreme forms of stultification and suffering as evidence that a mode of life was spiritually deficient.

The cases of Hetty and the actor presage more complex portrayals in Rand's later writings of tragic spiritual collapse, notably the collapses of Leo Kovalensky in *We the Living* and of Gail Wynand in *The Fountainhead*.²⁵ Not all spiritual collapse is tragic, in Rand's view; sometimes it is self-made and deserved, as in the case of Peter Keating in *The Fountainhead*, who lives to please and impress others, and whose lack of authentic values disables him in the end. Rand's most chilling fictional portrayal of deserved spiritual collapse is that of James Taggart toward the end of *Atlas Shrugged*; Taggart, when we last see him, is at the edge of insanity. Whatever the differences among these cases, as to the causes of collapse and the agent's own level of responsibility for it, what stands out in Rand's portrayals of the ends met by these various characters is that the individuals in question undergo the psychological destruction of their capacity to function as thinkers and agents. In that sense, their capacity to live is damaged. By contrast, the characters in Rand's fiction who are able to achieve and sustain spiritual well-being are able to sustain themselves as thinkers and agents, even in the most oppressive of circumstances. Kira Argounova, for instance—Rand's protagonist in *We the Living*—remains clear-sighted and intensely active right up to (and even briefly beyond) the moment when she is shot by a Soviet border guard in the attempt to escape from the USSR.

I am going to call the view that the nature of human life generates norms not just for man's physiological systems but for thought, choice, and action as well "the normative view of human life," or, for short, just "the normative view of life." We can find this view, in an attenuated form at least, in Rand's writings even before her notes for *The Skyscraper* and *The Little Street*. Here is a passage from a short story written in 1926, entitled "The Husband I Bought." In this passage, the protagonist, Irene Wilmer, describes her feelings in the aftermath of losing the husband she had deeply loved:

One has to live, as long as one is not dead. I live on. But I know that it will not be long, now. I feel that the end is approaching. I am not ill. But I know that my

strength is going and that life simply and softly is dying away in me. It has burned out. It is well.²⁶

Rand has not yet made the living-existing distinction that she introduces in *The Little Street*. But this passage relies on the same implicit contrast. Irene says previously that without her husband, “All was finished. . . . I had done my work. . . . Life was over.”²⁷ She lives on, then, even though her life is over. There is no contradiction in what she says here since two different senses of “living” are in play. Irene is not dead, but she moves through her days in a state of loneliness, isolation, and lethargy; in Rand’s subsequent terminology, she exists but does not truly live.²⁸ It is even clearer here than in Rand’s descriptions of Hetty and the actor, in the notes for *The Little Street*, that Irene is unable to go on in this state. Although there is nothing physically the matter with her, she has reached a point where she is incapable of sustaining herself spiritually.

The normative view of life also pervades Rand’s later writings. Although my main interest in this essay is Rand’s early work, I want to cite one (lengthy) later passage that is closely related in content to those we have considered so far. The passage, from a 1966 article entitled “Our Cultural Value Deprivation,” presents some of Rand’s mature perspective on the same issue of spiritual well-being and deficiency that I have been tracing in her early writings:

Man’s emotional mechanism works as the barometer of the efficacy or impotence of his actions. If severe and prolonged enough, the absence of a normal, active flow of *value experiences* may disintegrate and paralyze man’s consciousness—by telling him that no action is possible. . . .

A chronic lack of pleasure, of any enjoyable, rewarding or stimulating experiences, produces a slow, gradual, day-by-day erosion of man’s emotional vitality, which he may ignore or repress, but which is recorded by the relentless computer of his subconscious mechanism that registers an ebbing flow, then a trickle, then a few last drops of fuel—until the day when his inner motor stops and he wonders desperately why he has no desire to go on, unable to find any definable cause of his hopeless, chronic sense of exhaustion.

Yes, there are a few giants of spiritual self-sufficiency who can withstand even this. But this is too much to ask or to expect of most people, who are unable to generate and to maintain their own emotional fuel—their love of life—in the midst of a dead planet or a dead culture. And it is not an accident that *this* is the kind of agony—death by value-strangulation—that a culture dominated by alleged humanitarians imposes on the millions of men who need its help.

A peculiarity of certain types of asphyxiation—such as death from carbon monoxide—is that the victims do not notice it: the fumes leave them no awareness of their need of fresh air. The specific symptom of value-deprivation is a gradual lowering of one’s expectations. We have already absorbed so much of our cultural fumes that we take the constant pressure of irrationality, injustice, corruption and hooligan tactics for granted, as if nothing better could be expected of life. It is only in the privacy of their own mind that men scream in protest at times—and promptly stifle the scream as “unrealistic” or “impractical.” The man to whom values have no reality any longer—the man or the society that regards the pursuit of values, of *the good*, as impractical—is finished psychologically.²⁹

“Death by value strangulation” is death by a *spiritual affliction*. It is what Irene is in the process of undergoing when, shortly after the passage cited earlier, “The Husband I Bought” ends. Similarly, in *The Little Street*, it is the path that Hetty and the actor—who are trapped in a society that does not take the pursuit of values seriously—find themselves on.

Rand’s notes for *The Little Street* criticize conventional views of ethics. The criticism implies that she intends the normative view of life as a *replacement* for conventional morality:

Morals (as connected with religion) the real reason for all hypocrisy. The wrecking of man by teaching him ideals that are contrary to his nature; ideals he has to accept as his highest ambition, even though they are organically hateful and repulsive to him. And when he can’t doubt them, he doubts himself. He becomes low, sinful, imperfect in his own eyes. He does not aspire to anything high, when he knows that the high is inaccessible and alien to him. Humanity’s morals and ideals, its ideology, are the greatest of all its crimes. (“Unselfishness” first of all.)³⁰

Rand believes that the acceptance of conventional moral ideals, such as the belief that it is admirable to be selfless, is spiritually damaging. She does not yet explain why selflessness and other conventional ideals are harmful, but her rejection of conventional morality is predicated on the normative view of life. Later in the same set of notes, her character description of Danny Renahan tells us that he reflects “the perfect egoism and will to live,”³¹ which similarly suggests that the normative view of life will underwrite a defense of egoism.

But if Rand is proposing to replace conventional moral ideals, is she proposing to replace them with a new *morality* or with some *alternative* to morality? Norms of spiritual well-being are fundamentally egoistic: what they require of a person, they require for the person’s own sake. But on some views of morality, moral norms are by definition non-egoistic.³² Rand, however, rejects such views.³³ Holders of these views would see Rand as wanting to replace morality with something else. Although I think that there are decisive objections to such views, to engage the debate over the definition of morality would take us too far afield. In any event, the above passage shows that *Rand*, at least, thinks of morality simply as a system of ideals to live by. Since *this* conception of morality (which, if less widespread, is hardly idiosyncratic) leaves the content of moral ideals open, it would have us see Rand as wanting to replace conventional morality with a new set of moral ideals rooted in the normative view of life. This is certainly how she viewed her own aims; she meant to champion a new morality, not to advocate amorality.

THE NORMATIVE VIEW OF LIFE IN *WE THE LIVING* AND *IDEAL*

The distinction between living and existing—and with it the entire normative framework we have uncovered in *The Skyscraper*, *The Little Street*, and “The Husband I Bought”—carries over into Ayn Rand’s ethical thought during the early 1930s. Nowhere is this more evident than in her first (completed) novel, *We the Living*, which invokes the living-existing distinction right in its title. The title refers primarily to the novel’s three central characters, Kira Argounova, Leo Kovalensky, and Andrei Taganov. They are among the “living,” not because they have survived some great pestilence or holocaust, but because they are among those who “know how to value or desire,” in Rand’s words from *The Little Street*. In this section, I explore Rand’s use of the normative view of life in *We the Living* to undergird a political argument. I then discuss, much

more briefly, the rather different use she makes of the normative view of life in her play *Ideal*. My general aim in this section is to illustrate the continuing importance of the normative view of life in Rand's ethical thought during the period in which she wrote these two works, both of which were completed in 1934.

We the Living,³⁴ which is set in Russia during the years following the Bolshevik revolution, has a moral-political theme; it is a defense, on moral grounds, of political individualism and a critique of all forms of collectivism. Rand frames the opposition between individualism and collectivism in terms of an individual's right to pursue personal values. Individualism affirms such a right; collectivism denies it, requiring that the pursuit of personal values be subordinated to the pursuit of social goals and values. But if personal values are a spiritual need, then so, Rand believes, is the political freedom to pursue them; and if there is a spiritual need for political freedom, and collectivism deprives us of such freedom, then collectivism stands condemned by the normative view of life. This is *We the Living's* central moral argument for political individualism and against collectivism.³⁵

Rand's expansive sense of "living" is explicit in a scene from late in the novel, in which Kira confronts Andrei—who has been a Communist Party member and an officer of the G.P.U.—about what the communist system has done to her life. She says, in part:

Now look at me! Take a good look! I was born and I knew I was alive and I knew what I wanted. What do you think is living in me? Why do you think I'm alive? Because I have a stomach and eat and digest the food? Because I breathe and work and produce more food to digest? Or because I know what I want and that something which knows how to want—isn't that life itself? And who—in this damned endless universe—can tell me why I should live for anything but for that which I want? Who can answer that in human sounds that speak for human reason?³⁶

What Kira wants, fundamentally, are a career in engineering and a life with Leo, whom she loves. (That her chief wants are for two of the items on Rand's list in the earlier passage on "valuing and desiring" suggests, I think, that "wanting" has substantially the same meaning here as "valuing and desiring" has in that passage.) Both have been closed off to her for political reasons (she has been prevented from pursuing her career on account of her bourgeois lineage, and Leo has been sent to prison on account of his aristocratic lineage). The communist system thus destroys life not only through the material hardships it imposes, which *We the Living* depicts in ample detail, but by seeking to contain and control the process of valuing and desiring that is integral to living. Kira describes the system's spiritual toll in the same scene with Andrei:

you've tried to tell us what we should want. You came as a solemn army to bring a new life to men. You tore that life you knew nothing about, quivering, out of their very guts and you told them what it had to be. You took their every hour, their every minute, every nerve, every thought in the farthest corners of their souls, and you told them what it had to be. You came and you forbade life to the living. You've driven us all into an iron cellar and you've closed all doors, and you've locked us airtight, airtight till the blood vessels of our spirits burst! Then you stare and wonder what it's doing to us. Well, then, look! All of you who have eyes left—look!³⁷

The analogy between spiritual and physical deprivation and damage places this passage squarely within the framework of the normative view of life. The freedom to set one's own ends is presented here as a spiritual need, and the metaphor of being locked airtight anticipates Rand's later concept of "death by value strangulation."

We the Living is a detailed account of the spiritual costs of collectivism. Rand's most dramatic case study in the novel is Leo, and so I focus on him here.³⁸ Leo—who, as the son of a prominent counter-revolutionary, has been forced into hiding when the novel begins—is presented as having had latently the same passion for life as Danny Renahan has actually. But the first time we see him, there are signs that he has already been spiritually broken—or very nearly so. He advises Kira to run from people and warns her that it is his habit to "drink like a sponge."³⁹ They have met along a street in Petrograd, as Kira (lacking carfare) was making her way home and Leo was halfheartedly wandering in search of a prostitute. As they talk, "her face was a mirror for the beauty of his. Her face reflected no admiration, but an incredulous, reverent fear."⁴⁰ But Leo remains cynical, telling her, "I want to drink. I want a woman like you. I want to go down, as far down as you can drag me."⁴¹ Kira replies, "You know, you're very much afraid that you can't be dragged down"⁴²—and this is true. Leo, like Danny, "wants . . . life to be high, supreme, full of meaning."⁴³ If Rand believes that those who do *not* want this are spiritually deficient and suffer as a result, she believes that those who *do* want it, but are precluded from acting to achieve it, suffer that much more intensely. Leo makes this point explicitly the second time he and Kira meet:

I don't want to believe anything. I don't want to see too much. Who suffers in this world? Those who lack something? No. Those who have something they should lack. A blind man can't see, but it's more impossible not to see for one whose eyes are too sharp. More impossible and more of a torture. If only one could lose sight and come down, down to the level of those who never want it, never miss it.⁴⁴

In seeking to "drag himself down," Leo is seeking to obliterate his desire for a life "full of meaning." From Rand's perspective he has reason to be afraid that he cannot succeed at this—it means that his intense suffering will go unrelieved. Later, he tells Kira, "I thought you'd do it for me [that is, help him to degrade himself spiritually]. Now I'm afraid you'll be the one who'll save me from it. But I don't know whether I'll thank you."⁴⁵

At their first meeting, Leo marvels at Kira's "appetite for life." "If one no longer has that appetite," she tells him, "why sit at the table?" He replies, "Perhaps to collect under the table a few little crumbs of refuse—like you—that can still be amusing."⁴⁶ As they part—planning to meet again in a month if Leo, who is about to leave Petrograd, is able to re-enter the city—he says that he will see her again "If I'm still alive . . . and if I don't forget."⁴⁷ But Kira becomes an unexpected source of spiritual renewal for him. At the end of their second meeting, as they again make plans to meet in another month, Kira tries to anticipate him by stipulating that they will meet "If you're still alive—and if you don't. . . ." But Leo interrupts with, "No. I'll be alive—because I won't forget."⁴⁸ Kira has become for him a reason and an incentive to live. Nevertheless, Leo is hardly optimistic. He tells Kira that he has no desires except "to learn to desire something," and that he has little expectation of success in this regard.⁴⁹

If Leo's capacity to desire has been crippled, then, from the perspective of the normative view of life, so has his capacity to live. Why, however, does Leo lack the ability to desire anything? He seems inwardly stronger than Hetty or the actor in *The Little Street*. Rand first

describes him as follows: “His mouth, calm, severe, contemptuous, was that of an ancient chieftain who could order men to die, and his eyes were such as could watch it.”⁵⁰ It is therefore not clear that a cultural atmosphere of indifference to values would be sufficient to debilitate him, although his initial advice to Kira does suggest that he suffers from the sight of people who have no deep concerns and no enthusiasm for living. During their second meeting, Leo focuses on the political causes of his spiritual incapacitation. Kira, who at eighteen remains intensely optimistic, describes to him the engineering projects she sees in her future, including a glass skyscraper and an aluminum bridge. “Is it worth while, Kira?” Leo asks her. The exchange continues:

“What?”

“Effort. Creation. Your glass skyscraper. It might have been worth while—a hundred years ago. It may be worth while again—a hundred years from now, though I doubt it. But if I were given a choice—of all the centuries past—I’d select last the curse of being born in the one we’re living [in].”⁵¹

After telling Kira that the only desire he has is to learn to desire something, Leo gives a concise explanation of why he believes that effort and creation are not worth it: “It’s a curse, you know, to be able to look higher than you’re allowed to reach. One’s safest looking down, the farther down the safest—these days.”⁵² This explanation implies that the reason why Leo is incapable of desiring is that he will not be allowed to fulfill whatever desires he might form. And this makes sense: it is psychologically plausible that a belief that one will be precluded from achieving what one wants would undermine one’s ability to find anything to want.

It is clearly the political conditions of Soviet society (and perhaps other parts of the world) that Leo sees as the impediment here. Kira suggests that the system can be fought. But Leo finds the prospect of having to fight the communists itself degrading. “Sure,” he says, “you can muster the most heroic in you to fight lions. But to whip your soul to a sacred white heat to fight lice . . . ! No, that’s not good construction, comrade engineer. The equilibrium’s all wrong.”⁵³ In his mind as in Rand’s, the communists are motivated only by envy for life that is strong and successful; there is no grandeur, no idealism even of a misplaced kind, in their cause.⁵⁴ To accept the need to fight them, Leo believes, would be to degrade himself in a way that would render him spiritually unfit for victory.

Notwithstanding his love for Kira, Leo is unable to overcome the spiritual damage he suffers. An attempt (with Kira) to escape from the country fails, so he and Kira must try to function within the confines of the Soviet system. After a bout with tuberculosis and a stay at a Crimean sanatorium, Leo returns to Petrograd physically well but spiritually devastated. Here is part of his exchange with Kira when she meets him at the train station on his arrival home (Kira speaks first):

“And you’re well? Quite, quite completely well? Free to live again?”

“I am well—yes. As to living again . . .”

He shrugged. His face was tanned, his arms were strong, his cheeks were not hollow any more; but she noticed something in his eyes that had not been cured; something that, perhaps, had grown beyond cure.

She said:

“Leo, isn’t the worst of it over? Aren’t we ready now to begin. . . .”

“Begin with what? I’ve nothing to bring back to you—but a healthy body.”⁵⁵

Kira does not yet appreciate the way in which her own inner strength surpasses Leo’s. She is one of what Rand would later call the “giants of spiritual self-sufficiency,”⁵⁶ whereas Leo is not. What saves Kira, spiritually, is a heroic refusal to accept her present conditions of life as permanent and unalterable, and, consequently, a refusal to make terms with the society around her. “I’ll be afraid only on a day that will never come,” she tells her cousin, Irina. “The day when I give up.”⁵⁷ But Leo does give up, descending into alcoholism and increasingly risky behavior as an illegal speculator, in collaboration with the most cynical and corrupt elements of the Party. Just as Leo’s doubts about his ability to live again, despite his restored health, express the normative view of life, so, too, does Kira’s urgent warning to him, late in the novel, about the course he is pursuing:

Leo, the bootlicking and all those things—that’s nothing. There’s something much worse that it’s done to Victor, underneath, deeper, more final, and the bootlicking—it’s only a consequence. It does that. It kills something. Have you ever seen plants grown without sunlight, without air? It can’t do that to you. Let it take a hundred and fifty million living creatures. But not you, Leo! Not you, my highest reverence.⁵⁸

Kira now sees, as she did not in the scene at the train station, that Leo’s life remains endangered.

In the end it is Andrei who makes the political conclusions of *We the Living* explicit, in a speech at his Party Club that was to have been a routine report but becomes a critique of the Party itself. Andrei had initially seen the revolution and the ascendancy of the Bolsheviks as an opportunity to work against political and social oppression. Fired by idealism and consumed with his own work within the Party, he is slow to recognize the oppressive character of the revolution itself. Kira, whom he befriends and falls in love with, becomes the catalyst for that recognition. For although the revolution’s operating principles require the near-total absorption of the private sphere of life into the public, Andrei cannot help but see his relationship with Kira as a purely private matter, and his joy in that relationship as a justification for it that no public considerations (including Kira’s family background and conspicuous lack of interest in the Party) could override. Through his (ultimately unrequited) love for Kira, he grasps “what it is to feel things that have no reason but yourself [i.e., oneself]” and “how sacred a reason that can be” and that “a life is possible whose only justification is your [i.e., one’s] own joy.”⁵⁹ Contrary to the collectivist ideals of the Party, which call for the abolition of private purposes and private joys, Andrei now sees his own well-being and happiness as the proper purpose⁶⁰ and justification of his actions.

Andrei’s speech at the Party Club invokes the normative view of life as a justification for egoism and political individualism:

Every honest man lives for himself. Every man worth calling a man lives for himself. The one who doesn’t—doesn’t live at all. You cannot change it. You cannot change it because that’s the way man is born, alone, complete, an end in himself. You cannot change it any more than you can cause men to be born with one eye instead of two, with three legs or two hearts. No laws, no books, no G.P.U. will ever grow an extra nose on a human face.⁶¹

The man who does not live for himself “doesn’t live at all,” that is to say, he merely “exists,” his way of functioning is defective, with all that this implies for his ability to go on as a thinker and an agent. Once again, the reason why man must live for himself is grounded in human nature; man’s essential nature—“the way man is born”—is such that he cannot function successfully if he lives any other way. Andrei’s last sentence makes it clear that, for Rand, it is *nature* rather than convention that grounds the principles of ethics; these principles are no more alterable by human choice than are the biological principles of human physical development.⁶²

What is the relation between the form of egoism described here and the normative view of life? I noted in the last section that the normative view is implicitly egoistic in regard to the justification of norms: it issues prescriptions for action in the interest of the agent’s *own* well-being. From the perspective of the normative view of life, the requirements of the agent’s own well-being are sufficient justification for action. What Andrei’s statement now suggests is that a person’s spiritual well-being depends in part on his *adopting this perspective on himself*, that is, on his regarding himself as the normative view of life regards him (or his well-being), namely, as a stopping point in the process of justifying how he should live.

Andrei’s statement introduces the idea that human beings are *ends in themselves*. The phrase is a familiar one in Kantian ethics, but Rand gives it a different meaning from the one Kant attached to it. It would not fit with Kant’s interpretation of this phrase to say that one should “live for oneself,” that is, for one’s own chosen ends, since this would be to neglect the duty Kant believes we all have to embrace and further the ends of others.⁶³ Andrei uses the thesis that human beings are ends in themselves to challenge the Communist Party’s right to impose totalitarian rule. If individuals are ends in themselves, the state must leave them free to pursue their own self-chosen aims. For Rand, the thesis that human beings are ends in themselves also has a foundation in the normative view of life. When Andrei says that man is “born . . . an end in himself,” he is plainly not referring to the actual social conditions into which men are born, since it is not true that men are always born into societies that allow them to set their own ends. He is saying, rather, that the freedom to set one’s own ends is characteristic of human life in its non-defective forms and, therefore, is a norm for human life in general. The spiritually depleted condition of the masses under Soviet rule, as well as of their leaders, would be Rand’s evidence that a political regime that treats individual human beings as means to social ends promotes spiritual defect and decay.⁶⁴

The view that human life has spiritual needs, as well as physical and material ones, is also central to Rand’s play *Ideal*. In this connection, the play deserves much more extensive analysis than I can give it here; two brief points will have to suffice. The protagonist is a revered actress named Kay Gonda, a Garbo-esque figure at the peak of her fame. Rand’s career choice for Gonda is a brilliant stroke, for the play dramatizes *her* need for just the sort of heroic inspiration that her screen performances have provided for her fans. Late in the action, Gonda explains what it is that she longs for:

Johnnie. If all of you who look at me on the screen hear the things I say and worship me for them—where do I hear them? Where can I hear them, so that I might go on? I want to see real, living, and in the hours of my own days that glory I create as an illusion! I want it real! I want to know that there is someone, somewhere who wants it, too! Or else what is the use of seeing it, and working, and burning oneself for an impossible vision. A spirit, too, needs fuel. It can run dry.⁶⁵

This passage refers to (or implies) three distinct kinds of spiritual need. There are the needs satisfied by artistic representations, such as a screen performance (but by implication any form of art). There is the need to see artistic ideals made real in the world around us (for example, to see real achievements, or real acts of heroism or justice, similar in significance to those that might be dramatized in a work of fiction). And there is the need for *other persons* who take inspiration from the same ideals or values as oneself. In an earlier scene, involving a character whom she briefly views as a soul mate, Gonda calls this last the need for an “answering voice”:

One can do it just so long. One can keep going on one’s own power, and wring dry every drop of hope—but then one has to find help. One has to find an answering voice, an answering hymn, an echo. I am very grateful to you.⁶⁶

I will not attempt to analyze Rand’s treatment of each of these three kinds of spiritual need here. For present purposes, I simply want to stress that what is at stake, for Gonda, in the satisfaction of these needs, is *her ability to go on with her life*. This is explicit in both passages, and it reflects the continuing prevalence in Rand’s thought of the normative view of life.

NORMS AND BIOLOGY

In *We the Living* and *Ideal*, Rand uses metaphors involving physical harm or deficiency to convey the point that there are forms of spiritual deprivation that can be as devastating for a human being, in the long run, as any purely physical deprivation or malfunction, such as a lack of air or the breaking of a blood vessel or, in the case of plants, a lack of sunlight. The metaphors are literarily striking but, philosophically, just what one would expect to see in Rand’s fiction, since the normative view of life depends precisely on an analogy between physical and spiritual needs. Rand’s clearest, most explicit formulation of this analogy comes in a set of philosophical notes made in 1934, the same year in which she completed both *We the Living* and *Ideal*.

At one point, the notes discuss the will and freedom of the will. Rand writes:

And if, as according to Mencken, the question of “freedom of the will” has to be studied on the basis of psychology with all its dark complexes—then what are we actually studying? Will as it is expressed in subnormal cases? Or in normal, average cases? Or in the highest types of human mentality?

Are we studying will as *it is* actually in the majority of cases—or as *it can be essentially*, as a human attribute?

Do we judge all human terms as applied to existing humanity or to humanity’s highest possibility?

If we are trying to form a general conception of a “stomach”—do we study a hundred diseased stomachs—and form our general conception from that—so that “stomach” as such is something with a number of diseases attached to it—or do we find the healthy stomach first, in order to learn what it is, and *then* judge the others by comparison?⁶⁷

It is not clear what, in H. L. Mencken’s writings, this passage refers to, but this is not particularly important for eliciting the point of the passage. Rand ascribes to Mencken the view that to consider the problem of free will it is necessary to study psychology “with all its dark complexes.” Whether it is Mencken who sees psychological study as focusing on “dark

complexes” or Rand who does (perhaps due to the impact of Freud on the field at that time)—and so whether Rand is challenging a particular conception of psychological inquiry (held by Mencken among others) or the relevance of psychology *per se* in a study of the will—is uncertain. Nevertheless, her view is that a method of inquiry focusing on “dark complexes” gives *defective* cases of willing undue influence on our overall understanding of the will. Rand maintains instead that study of the will should be broadly analogous to study of the stomach or of any other biological organ or system. It should be predicated, therefore, on some analogue of the distinction between a healthy and a diseased organ, and it should take the “healthy” will as its point of departure. The failure to proceed in this way will lead to a distorted conception of the will, according to Rand, just as the failure to distinguish between healthy and diseased stomachs, or to take the healthy stomach as a point of departure for biological study of the digestive system, would lead to a distorted conception of the stomach.⁶⁸

Rand clearly views the biological sciences as normative rather than merely descriptive or statistical disciplines. We are to “find the healthy stomach first,” study its nature and functioning, and then “judge the others by comparison.” She is surely right about this. The normative approach is indispensable in biology. The stomach, for example, could not be understood apart from the concepts of health and disease. But health and disease are *normative* concepts: “health” is not the state of the majority of the members of a species or of any statistically defined subgroup; it is a state characterized by the *proper* operation of an organism’s various systems (such as the respiratory system, the nervous system, and so forth). To distinguish healthy from diseased stomachs is to make a normative judgment about them. But it is only on the basis of such judgments that we can come to understand what the stomach *is*. For to understand what the stomach is, is *not* to know a set of statistics about stomachs. To understand what the stomach is, is to understand *what it ought to be*—what its proper operation consists in and requires. If we tried to exclude any normative perspective on the subject matter from biological inquiry, we would risk falling into the absurd sort of procedure that Rand lampoons in the above passage: the procedure of generalizing from a series of defective cases, and concluding that an organ or system is *by nature* in a condition that a normative perspective would identify as subnormal and diseased. The risk would remain even if we based our generalizations on what is statistically typical among a given population, since it is possible for a diseased or unhealthy state to be statistically typical (consider the incidence of myopia among humans or the growing incidence of obesity and of adult-onset diabetes among Americans). Anything we did learn about healthy stomachs (or what have you) would be purely accidental, and there would be nothing in our conceptual framework to flag such knowledge as having any significance beyond whatever statistical significance it might have.

In the above passage, Rand seems to be suggesting that the method of inquiry used in biology can serve as a model for philosophical or psychological inquiry concerning the will. The reasoning seems to be that *since* we study the stomach (for example) normatively in biology, so, too, should we study the will normatively in philosophy or psychology. What might have led Rand to think that biology should be the model here? I suspect that she is *antecedently convinced* that there is a distinction to be made between the “highest instances” of the will and various levels of lesser instances. The question is then how to account for this distinction and determine its principle. What we are dealing with is a distinction in value, and Rand, as an atheist, would have rejected out of hand any theological basis for such distinctions. She is also too empirical-minded to accept a non-naturalist account of value along the lines of Plato’s or G. E. Moore’s,⁶⁹ and too contrary in her judgments of “higher” and “lower” to prevailing standards of value to

take seriously the possibility that value-distinctions are rooted in culture or convention. Nor, clearly, is she willing to consider the distinction between higher and lower instances of the will an arbitrary one or a mere reflection of her own preferences in people. The distinction, as she sees it, is neither personally nor socially constructed, nor is it supernatural in origin. But then the same is true of biological norms (or so I would argue). What makes it true that a stomach in a certain condition is healthy—that it is as it ought to be—is neither that it is individually or socially approved of; that it is approved of by God; that it instantiates a non-natural property of “health”; nor that we simply call stomachs like that “healthy.” Biology, then, offers a model for norms that are objective but non-supernatural, norms with just the features Rand would have wanted to ascribe to the distinction she draws between the higher and lower instances of the will. As we have already seen, Rand deploys just such a model widely in her early writings, and she may have concluded, from repeated applications, that it helps make sense of a range of observations she had made about human life, for instance, that certain kinds of social conditions incapacitate us spiritually, or that having an integrated worldview helps us gather and sustain the initiative for demanding forms of action.

VALUES AND THE SELF: NOTES FOR *THE FOUNTAINHEAD*

In the mid-1930s, Ayn Rand began to work on her novel *The Fountainhead*. Her earliest working notes for the novel show her exploring further two issues we have seen her raise previously: the importance of values in human life and the justification of egoism. I will not discuss *The Fountainhead* in this essay, nor much from these notes, but I want to briefly document the continuing influence of the normative view of life on Rand’s view of the nature of values.

In a passage dated December 4, 1935, she writes:

are morals, or ethics, or all higher values a thing outside, god’s law or society’s prescription, something related not to a man, but to others around him, an ultimatum forced upon man and essentially selfless and unselfish? *Or*—a man’s very own, his sacred, highest right, his best inspiration, his real life and real self? . . . If, then, the higher values of life (such as all ethics, all philosophy, all esthetics, everything in short that results from a *sense of valuation* in the mental life of man) come from within, from man’s own spirit—then they are a right, a privilege and a necessity—*not a duty*. They are that, which constitutes a man’s life—and he, therefore, if he is an egoist in the best sense of the word, will choose these higher values *for himself* and for himself alone, that is, for his own sake and satisfaction, not because of a duty to god, fellow-men, the state or any other fool abstraction outside of himself. If a man has a certain code of ethics it is primarily for his own sake, not for anyone else’s.⁷⁰

The subject of the passage is the nature of the “highest” or most abstract sorts of values. Rand describes such values as “a right, a privilege and a necessity.” I take it that what she means in calling them a “right” is not that these values should in some way be guaranteed to one—Rand never accepted the concept of “positive” rights, rights to be furnished with various goods or services—but that one has a right to pursue values unhindered by interference from others. She is thus re-affirming the political individualism defended in *We the Living*. Given this interpretation of the idea that values are “a right,” Rand’s next point, that values are “a privilege,” cannot be taken to mean that having or pursuing values is a privilege granted to us by others (and so

potentially revocable by them). She is using “privilege” more loosely, to refer to something one takes pleasure in, as opposed to something one endures grudgingly or with difficulty. In Rand’s view, then, we have a right to pursue values and it is a pleasure, not a burden, to do so. Her next claim is even stronger: values, she writes, are “a necessity”—they are something we cannot do without. The claims that values are a “privilege” and a necessity are readily understandable in light of the normative view of life. The need for values and desires, as a guide and inspiration to action, has been central to her elaboration of that view all along; and pursuing or upholding what we value should benefit us spiritually and, consequently, be a pleasure, not a burden, according to the framework that the normative view of life provides.

Rand goes on to say that values are “that which constitutes a man’s life.” Here she rejects what might be called a *materialistic* conception of living, by which I mean a view that conceives of living exclusively in terms of physical self-maintenance. If holding values partially constitutes the life of a human being, then a human being’s life comprises more than physical self-maintenance, and keeping oneself *alive* will involve more than just attending to physical needs. In effect, what Rand is doing here is reaffirming the distinction between “living” and “existing” presented in the notes for *The Little Street*. She is construing the holding of values as a necessary life-function for a human being. This makes it explicit that the standard of need being invoked in the statement that values are “a necessity” is the same as in Rand’s earlier elaborations of the normative view of life, namely, the life-needs of a human being.

THE ETHICAL VISION OF *ANTHEM*

Like *We the Living*, *Anthem* is a defense of individualism, this time against the backdrop of a mythic society of the remote future, rather than a real society from Ayn Rand’s recent past. The society is so thoroughly collectivized that even proper names and singular pronouns have vanished. The populace is so thoroughly obedient and demoralized that Rand’s protagonist, Equality 7-2521, unlike Kira in *We the Living*, has no trouble escaping across an un-patrolled border, once he decides that this is what he must do. The difference here is emblematic of a more general shift of focus, from Kira’s struggle against a collectivist society to an inner struggle, on Equality’s part, to understand his own rebellious nature.

Does the normative view of life survive into *Anthem*? Several features of the story show that it does. The clearest indication that the normative view is still operative comes after Equality has broken from his society and fled into a deserted area known as the Uncharted Forest. At one point, Equality reflects on the ethical teachings of his society:

There is no life for men, save in the useful toil for the good of all of their brothers. But we lived not, when we toiled for our brothers, we were only weary. There is no joy for men, save the joy shared with all their brothers. But the only two things which set our soul on fire are the power we created in our glass box and the Golden One. And both these joys belong to us alone and concern not our brothers in any way. Thus do we wonder. (114/220)⁷¹

This passage relies on the living-existing distinction. Toiling for his brothers, Equality was unable to sustain that active vitality which, as we saw from her description of Danny Renahan, in Rand’s view characterizes those who are fully engaged with life; he existed but did not live. By the terms of the normative view of life, therefore, the life of toil for one’s brothers must be regarded as a defective form of human life, which is exactly how Equality is here in the process

of coming to view it. “If that which we have found is the corruption of solitude,” he wonders, “then what can men wish save corruption? If this is the great evil of being alone, then what is good and what is evil?” (113–114/219–20).

Similarly, according to the normative view of life, a life well lived will be joyous, whereas suffering and the absence of joy are indications that a way of life is defective.⁷² The leaders of Equality’s former society claimed that the only possible forms of joy are those which a person shares with all his fellow men. Equality’s own experience, however, has suggested that this is not the case. He found no joy in the life he shared with his “brothers,” but his secret and unauthorized construction of an electric light and his experiences with Gaea, a young woman he meets, have been the private, unshared sources of the deepest joy he has known. This implies that the rules of his former society, which forbid private human relationships and private work and study, mandate a defective way of life, and that Equality’s violations of those rules have made his life more ideal.

Other evidence that Equality acquires supports the same conclusions. His life and his society are shot through with ethical inversions, in which the good looks like evil and the evil looks like good. International 4-8818, who conspires with Equality to violate the rules prohibiting private undertakings and private enjoyments, “are a tall, strong youth and their eyes are like fireflies, for they twinkle and there is laughter in them. We cannot look upon International 4-8814 and not smile in answer” (26/132). Although Equality believes that “The depth of our crime is not for the human mind to probe” (37/143), he finds that

there is no shame in us and no regret. We say to ourselves that we are a wretch and a traitor. But we feel no burden upon our spirit and no fear in our heart. And it seems to us that our spirit is clear as a lake troubled by no eyes save those of the sun. And in our heart—strange are the ways of evil!—in our heart is the first peace we have known in twenty years. (37–38/143–44)

To have a personal friend or lover is called the “Transgression of Preference” and is against the rules of Equality’s society. Yet when Equality commits this transgression for the second time, by taking an interest in Gaea, he “know[s] not why, when we think of them, we feel of a sudden that the earth is good and that it is not a burden to live” (44/150), and he finds himself singing after walking home from meeting her (51/157). One of the society’s worst transgressors of the rules, who is burned at the stake, is so fully at peace with himself that there is “no pain in their eyes and no knowledge of the agony of their body. There was only joy in them, a joy holier than it is fit for human joy to be” (59/165).

By contrast, those who do live by the rules have bowed heads and “eyes that are not clear, but veiled and lusterless, and never do they look one another in the eyes” (52/158). In addition,

[t]he shoulders of our brothers are hunched and weary, and their muscles drawn, as if their bodies were shrinking and wished to shrink out of sight. And a word steals into our mind, as we look upon our brothers, and that word is fear. (52/158)

Equality adds:

There is fear hanging in the air of the sleeping halls, and in the air of the streets. Fear walks through the City. . . . All men feel it and none dare to speak.

We feel it also when we are in the Home of the Street Sweepers. But here, in our tunnel we feel it no longer. The air is pure under the earth. There is no odor of men here. And we feel clean, clean as if we had stepped out of a bath. (52–53/158–59)

Although the ethical code of his society specifies that “it must not matter to us whether we live or die” because “we matter not,” Equality “rejoice[s] to be living” (53/159). But his “brothers” are seen to “cry without reason” or to scream “Help us!” in their sleep (53–54/159–60), and the leaders of the society evince terror at the sight of Equality’s new invention when he presents them with his electric light and demonstrates its workings (90–91/196–97).

In terms of the ethical standards of Equality’s society, one would have to say that moral goodness leads to fear and desperation, whereas moral evil produces feelings of joy, cleanliness, and inner peace. This seems highly paradoxical, to say the least, and it is a paradox that Equality ultimately cannot accept. But he does not resolve the paradox until he has lived in the Uncharted Forest and discovered that the “corruption of solitude” is a myth. Before that time, the paradox festers, as Equality’s damnation of himself becomes ever more complete. Noticing that he cares less and less whether he violates society’s rules, he writes,

It cannot be, we cannot be as evil as this. But we are. If only, we pray, if only we could suffer as we say this. Could we but suffer remorse, we would know that there is a spark of good left in us. But we suffer not. Our hand is light. Our hand and the thought which drives our hand to write, laugh at us and know no shame. (66/172)

Upon entering the Uncharted Forest, he believes that “We have torn ourselves away from the truth which is our brother men, and there is no road back for us, and no redemption” (98/204). The final stage of his self-excoriation comes when he acknowledges his true motives for producing his electric light. It had been possible for him to consider the light good without challenging his society’s ethical standards by thinking of the ways in which the light could benefit mankind. However, Equality confesses, “We have lied to ourselves. We have not built this box for the good of our brothers. We built it for its own sake. It is above all our brothers to us, and its truth above their truth” (99/205). That realization leads Equality to pronounce himself “one of the Damned” (99/205), and, expecting that he will never see Gaea again, to conclude that “It is best if the Golden One forget our name and the body which bore that name” (99/205).

Taking the normative view of life as the basis for ethical judgments would require Equality to re-assess the standards by which he has judged himself, in light of the fact that violating these standards has brought him joy rather than suffering. It need not be denied that a person can feel good, for a time, about doing wrong. But if moral evil is a form of spiritual defect, with the criterion of defectiveness being the requirements of spiritual or psychological self-sustenance, then moral evil must be linked with emotional suffering in a manner broadly analogous to the way in which ill-health is linked to physical pain. At the time when he enters the Uncharted Forest, Equality is not ready for a re-assessment of his ethical standards. He takes his lack of remorse as proof that he lacks any spark of goodness, on the premise that a person who felt no remorse over wrongdoing would have to be unremittably evil; he does not yet view his lack of remorse as grounds for challenging the standards of wrongdoing that he is applying. Why is this? The reason, it seems to me, is that at this point, he believes that he shortly *will* begin to suffer for his many transgressions and expects that, in the end, he *will* regret how he has lived.

In entering the Uncharted Forest, he believes, he is beginning his descent into the ultimate form of moral corruption, the “corruption of solitude.” In the moral universe of Equality’s former society, the Uncharted Forest is the earthly equivalent of Hell, and the corruption of solitude—the corruption of a life wholly separate from that of the mass of men—is a penalty of equivalent severity to consumption by fire. Implicitly, therefore, Equality *does* accept the normative view of life; he believes that human nature is a source of norms concerning the overall form that a human life must take, and that the attempt to live in a manner at odds with these norms must ultimately be self-destructive. However, he believes that the norms warranted by human nature are precisely those of his former society. Because those norms have continued to govern significant aspects of his life, even if he has varied from them significantly as well, he has not yet had an opportunity to test them fully. Thus, from his perspective, upon entering the Uncharted Forest, the likeliest explanation for his lack of remorse over his “evil” is not that he has judged himself by the wrong standards, but that evil has so thoroughly permeated the depths of his soul that only the corruption of solitude could stir him to remorse—by which time it will be too late.⁷³

The passages with which we began this section show Equality in the process of revising his moral outlook. “We have broken the law,” he writes just before the first of these passages, “but we have never doubted it. Yet now, now as we walk through the forest, a great doubt rises in our heart” (114/220). It is his experience of life in the Uncharted Forest—the life that was to have exposed him to the greatest physical dangers and to have brought him to the deepest, most final state of moral corruption—that fuels this doubt. Equality discovers that he is capable of sustaining himself independently; the rumors of terrifying beasts and insurmountable perils turn out to have been unfounded. Moreover, there are forms of joy accessible to him that were impossible in his former society. Not only is he able to supply his own food, without having to rely on his brothers to provide it, but the process of feeding himself now acquires spiritual significance for him. Equality tells of killing a bird with a stone:

We made a fire and we cooked the bird and we ate it, and no meal had ever tasted better to us. And we thought suddenly that there was a great satisfaction to be found in the food which we need and obtain by our own hand. And we wished to be hungry again and soon, that we might know again this strange new pride in eating. (103/209)

What converts Equality’s doubts about his former society’s moral code into certainty that this code must be rejected is his discovery that an entire culture, highly advanced both in its intellectual and material achievements, had flourished in the same environment in which he himself has found his greatest sense of fulfillment and well-being. In chapter X, he and Gaea discover a house from the Unmentionable Times—the remote (and individualistic) past—abundantly stocked with artifacts of that culture, and at the conclusion of their exploration of this house, Equality declares,

This moment is a warning and an omen. This moment is a sacrament which calls us and dedicates our body to the service of some unknown duty we shall know. Old laws are dead. Old tablets have been broken. A clean, unwritten slate is now lying before our hands. Our fingers are to write. (125–26/231–32)

Equality now believes that he has grasped the ultimate results of the transgressions he has committed. The house he and Gaea explore is a private residence, equipped for only two people, as evidenced by the fact that it contains only two beds (120–21/226–27). He therefore recognizes

it as an artifact of a culture that sanctioned and protected an individual's right to a private life, a culture whose moral code was the opposite of his own society's moral code. The code of his society has produced stagnation and misery. The rejection of that code, Equality is now in a position to conclude, opens the way not to some extreme of suffering and corruption but to intellectual advancement, material abundance, and joy. From the evidence of his own case and of the culture of the Unmentionable Times, he is now certain that he must reject the moral code of his former society and revise his judgments of himself.

In the above passage, Equality recognizes that he needs to find a new moral code to live by; the blank slate must not remain blank. And just as the normative view of life implicitly drives his rejection of his society's moral code, so too does it provide the implicit framework for a new code. Equality now believes that

my joy needs no reason and no questions and no higher aim to vindicate it. My joy is not the means to any end. It is the end. It is the reason of reasons. This earth is mine. This earth exists but as a field for my desires and for the choice of my will. I am upon this earth but for the joy I wrest from it. What blind vanity, what folly can command me to live for pain? (130/236)

To allow a higher aim to constrain one's pursuit of happiness is to view one's own spiritual needs as providing insufficient justification for decisions about how to live. But that, in turn, is to accept that suffering and the frustration of those needs is endemic to the *proper* way to live, which, from the perspective of the normative view of life is an inversion of the truth. Equality thus dismisses the thought that he should put any other end above his own happiness as a "folly."

Equality intends in time to "call to me all the men and the women whose spirits have not been killed within them and who suffer under the yoke of their brothers" (141/247). Like Kay Gonda, he knows he needs an "answering voice" (and more than one), as well as partners in the construction of a new society. The satisfaction of both these needs will depend on the ability of those around him to preserve *their own* spiritual well-being. Equality therefore resolves that he will "ask none to live for me, nor [will] I live for any others. I covet no man's soul, nor is my soul theirs to covet" (131/237). He adds that he "shall choose companions from among my brothers, but neither slaves nor masters" (132/238). His need *for* others gives him a reason to respect the spiritual needs (and so the autonomy) *of* others.

CONCLUSION

When Ayn Rand discussed the need for values in her notes for *The Little Street*, her examples of values were both particular (an individual person) and abstract (an idea). Later, in her *Fountainhead* working notes, she stresses the need for abstract ethical values, which she saw as defining a person's identity and giving shape to his life. She does not yet attempt to settle what ethical values a person should hold, other than those associated with egoism and individualism. In the 1940s and 1950s, however, she fills this gap, arguing that human beings need a specific code of moral values and virtues. In this period she argues explicitly, in terms only foreshadowed in her writings of the 1930s, that this moral code is a prerequisite of a human being's long-range physical and material survival.

There is no over-emphasizing the significance Rand placed on this last point, which is dramatized vividly and extensively in *Atlas Shrugged*. But if she is concerned there to show the material benefits of morality, she is equally concerned to show that the process of satisfying

material needs has spiritual and moral meaning—a point that returns us to Equality’s killing of the bird and to his “strange new pride in eating.” Rand was serious in what she wrote to John Temple Graves; she did regard a spiritually empty life as a form of “living death” worse than “swift physical annihilation.” If one reads her later writings carelessly or too selectively, one can miss the importance she attaches to needs of the *psyche* and matters of spiritual well-being. I hope the present discussion has illustrated that one thereby misses something of crucial importance in her thought.

NOTES

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1. Michael S. Berliner, ed., *Letters of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1995), 33–34.
 2. See Ayn Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness: A New Concept of Egoism* (New York: New American Library, 1964), and *Atlas Shrugged* (New York: Random House, 1957; Signet thirty-fifth anniversary paperback edition, 1992). These are the two main sources for Rand’s mature ethical views, although there are a number of important ancillary sources, including the essays “Causality Versus Duty” (in Ayn Rand, *Philosophy: Who Needs It* [New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1982; Signet paperback edition, 1984]) and “Who is the Final Authority in Ethics?” (in Ayn Rand, *The Voice of Reason: Essays in Objectivist Thought*, ed. Leonard Peikoff [New York: New American Library, 1989; Meridian paperback edition, 1990]); and Rand’s book on esthetics, *The Romantic Manifesto: A Philosophy of Literature*, revised edition (New York: Signet, 1975).
 3. Undated composition book from the 1920s, pages 18–20. Ayn Rand Archives. Safe #2, item 62. Reprinted in David Harriman, ed., *Journals of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1997), 8.
 4. See, for instance, the description below of how most people live their lives, drawn from her notes for the planned (but never written) novel *The Little Street*.
 5. Which is not to say that there is nothing more to biology than this, but only that to the extent that biology seeks to characterize the way in which a given species lives or a given organic system operates, it must set aside cases of defect and disease.
 6. This way of understanding the statement about achievement should not be taken to imply that a person could not be responsible for his failure to seek achievement, any more than the parallel claims about healthy functioning would imply that a person could not be responsible for being in poor health.
 7. Neither, of course, is she foreclosing the possibility that some people will live as they ought to.
 8. Or more precisely, perhaps, the idea seems to be that life “demands to be” a process of *seeking* achievement, since the norm Rand presents tells us to *aim* for achievement. I take it that if external circumstances frustrated one’s efforts to achieve, one would still have adhered to this norm as long as one has done what one reasonably could to make one’s efforts successful.
 9. Another view that seeks an internal source for norms would be the Kantian view that *rational nature* gives rise to norms binding on every *rational* being. This view also rejects the attempt to ground norms in social convention, divine will, or any other “external” source of authority. But it contrasts with the view that *human* nature generates norms applicable only to *human* life, because it abstracts away from every human attribute except rationality. Since there is nothing to suggest that Rand was following this latter procedure, I read her as seeking to ground norms for human life in (the whole of) human nature. Although, as far as I am aware, Rand did not explicitly discuss the alternative, Kantian view, it is clear from her later epistemological writings that she would have rejected Kant’s appeal to a priori concepts, including the (putatively) a priori concept of a rational being, without which the Kantian approach cannot get off the ground. See Ayn Rand, *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, expanded second edition, edited by Harry Binswanger and Leonard Peikoff (New York: Meridian, 1990). (Rand did express strenuous objections to other aspects of Kant’s ethics, related to its focus on the concept of “duty,” in her article, “Causality Versus Duty.”)

10. The concept of “health,” and the nature of norms of health, have been subjects of philosophic controversy. I am presupposing a certain kind of account of these matters, which I believe is both common-sensical and philosophically supportable. But I cannot argue this point here. For a defense of the general sort of view I am assuming, see James G. Lennox, “Health as an Objective Value,” *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 20 (1995): 499–511.

11. For instance, in *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, discussing the formation of concepts having to do with “moral or spiritual values,” she notes parenthetically that she is using the term “spiritual” to mean “pertaining to consciousness.” See Rand, *Objectivist Epistemology*, 33. In some early notes that I will discuss below, she writes of someone being “wrecked spiritually,” where the meaning is simply that the person has been psychologically damaged, rather than anything mystical, so the usage I propose in the text seems to be one that she adopted early on.

12. For purposes of this article, I am going to set aside the question of whether a commitment to achievement, and the other attitudes and practices that Rand will link with spiritual well-being, should be understood (on her view) as conditions of spiritual well-being or as helping to constitute spiritual well-being. This would be an important question to address in a fuller discussion, but as far as I can see nothing hangs on it here.

13. These notes are not part of the collections of the Ayn Rand Archives, and I have been unable to examine them directly. I rely, therefore, on an edited version of the notes contained in Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*. Square brackets within the passages quoted from these notes reflect Hardman’s interpolations.

14. Harriman, *Journals*, 24.

15. For a more positive later assessment, at least of ordinary Americans, see Rand’s article “Don’t Let it Go,” in *Philosophy: Who Needs It*, 250–62.

16. Though Rand is not explicit about this, I assume that she means to expand rather than replace her earlier characterization of spiritual well-being, since there is nothing to suggest a retraction of that characterization, and since her later writings continue to stress the importance of achievement.

17. Harriman, *Journals*, 28.

18. Harriman, *Journals*, 28.

19. Presumably those who “exist” but do not “live” have some minimal concerns and incentives, if only to find food for their next meal or to go out to a movie. What they lack are the more-than-minimal values and desires that give shape and meaning to one’s life—that give one something to live for. I will assume this qualification in subsequent discussion of the need for values and desires.

20. Deficiency here does not entail responsibility. Rand’s early writings suggest two factors that would mitigate a person’s responsibility for spiritual deficiency: the possibility that spiritual well-being is partly a function of innate predispositions and the possibility that it depends in part on the social environment. In her later writings, Rand abandons the idea that individuals can be innately predisposed toward or away from spiritual well-being. But, as I will indicate briefly below, she retains the idea that spiritual well-being depends in part on one’s social environment. (For the idea that spiritual well-being depends on innate predispositions, see Harriman, *Journals*, 28.)

21. Harriman, *Journals*, 33–34.

22. That, at any rate, was the tentative story line. Like Howard Roark’s dynamiting of the Cortlandt Homes housing project in *The Fountainhead*, and Steve Ingalls’s murder of Walter Breckenridge in *Think Twice*, Danny’s crime is intended as a symbolic, literary representation of his refusal to be victimized by injustice. (For Rand’s play *Think Twice*, see Leonard Peikoff, ed., *The Early Ayn Rand: Selections From Her Unpublished Fiction* [New York: New American Library, 1984; Signet paperback edition, 1986], 296–377.)

23. Harriman, *Journals*, 30.

24. In one respect, one would expect even small degrees of spiritual defect to be more dangerous. The human body has automatic responses to physical impairments (think of the responses triggered within the immune system, or of what happens when one gets a small cut or scrape). These are sometimes sufficient to correct the problem. Is there a similar kind of automatic corrective mechanism at the spiritual

level? Rand's eventual view will be that there is not (although she will hold that our emotional responses can warn us of problems, if we understand what those responses mean). Impairments to spiritual well-being will all have to be corrected by individual choice (at least where the social environment is not implicated in the problem). That presents the risk of their going uncorrected and continuing to do damage.

25. See Ayn Rand, *We the Living* (New York: Signet sixtieth anniversary paperback edition, 1996), and *The Fountainhead* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1943; Signet fiftieth anniversary paperback edition, 1993).

26. Ayn Rand, "The Husband I Bought," in *Early Ayn Rand*, 35.

27. Rand, "Husband I Bought," 34.

28. Once again, since in Rand's view external conditions beyond a person's control can affect whether one is able to live, rather than merely exist, it does not follow that Irene is to blame for her problems. The story makes it clear that Rand considers her blameless and, indeed, heroic in the face of the circumstances she has faced (she has had to decide whether to encourage her husband's love for another woman, a love her husband's sense of marital fidelity has made him unwilling to acknowledge). Irene reproaches herself for loving "beyond all consciousness." It is not clear whether Rand, at this time, would have considered it a mistake (albeit a non-culpable one) to love another person "too deeply." The love story in *We the Living* is far more tragic than that presented here, but there is no sign of such a view there, and later on Rand would assuredly have regarded such a view as evincing what she called the "malevolent universe premise," the view that our most important values will always be defeated.

29. Ayn Rand, "Our Cultural Value Deprivation," in *The Voice of Reason*, 100–14; see 103–4.

30. Harriman, *Journals*, 25.

31. Harriman, *Journals*, 31.

32. See, for example, Kurt Baier, *The Moral Point of View* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1958), and Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

33. Later on, in a 1963 essay entitled "Collective Ethics," she criticizes views of this kind for "substituting a specific ethics . . . for the wider abstraction of 'ethics'" (*Virtue of Selfishness*, 103–11; see 105).

34. Since my focus, in this article, is on Rand's ethical thought in the 1920s and 1930s, I rely on the 1936 first edition of *We the Living* (New York: Macmillan, 1936) rather than on the revised edition, which was published in 1959 and contains significant changes, including changes in the wording of certain important philosophical passages. For an analysis of these changes, see Robert Mayhew, "We the Living: '36 and '59" and Shoshana Milgram, "From *Airtight* to *We the Living*: The Drafts of Ayn Rand's First Novel," both in *Essays on Ayn Rand's We the Living*, ed. Robert Mayhew (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004), 185–219 and 3–45, respectively. For ease of reference, I will give page references to the revised edition (cited in note 25, above) parenthetically after each reference to the first edition.

35. It does not seem, at this point, that Rand has worked out what precise role the state should have in an individualistic social system. In *We the Living*, Kira describes the state as "a necessity and a convenience" for individuals, rather than something for which individuals must sacrifice themselves, but in her early writings (published and otherwise) Rand's remarks on the state tend to be rather indefinite. See Rand, *We the Living*, 94 (revised edition, 90).

36. Rand, *We the Living*, 496 (revised edition, 404).

37. Rand, *We the Living*, 496 (revised edition, 404–5).

38. For further analysis of *We the Living*, in this regard, see Tara Smith, "Forbidding Life to Those Still Living," in Mayhew, *Essays on Ayn Rand's We the Living*, 317–34.

39. Rand, *We the Living*, 59 (revised edition, 62).

40. Rand, *We the Living*, 58 (revised edition, 62). In the revised edition, Rand changes "fear" to "awe."

41. Rand, *We the Living*, 59–60 (revised edition, 63).

42. Rand, *We the Living*, 60 (revised edition, 63).

43. Harriman, *Journals*, 28.

44. Rand, *We the Living*, 86 (revised edition, 83). I take it that the statement that “[t]hose who lack something” do not suffer is an exaggeration intended to highlight Leo’s point that those who “have something they should lack” suffer far more. For he goes on to say that life is “more impossible and more of a torture” for those in the latter group than for those in the former, implying that those in the former do suffer to some extent. Similarly, even if those in the former group “never want” and “never miss” what they lack, it would not follow that their deficiency causes them no suffering, but only that they would have difficulty grasping the cause of whatever suffering they had to endure, whereas people such as Leo understand why they suffer.

45. Rand, *We the Living*, 86 (revised edition, 84).

46. Rand, *We the Living*, 60 (revised edition, 63).

47. Rand, *We the Living*, 64 (revised edition, 66).

48. Rand, *We the Living*, 87 (revised edition, 84).

49. Rand, *We the Living*, 85 (revised edition, 83).

50. Rand, *We the Living*, 56 (revised edition, 61).

51. Rand, *We the Living*, 85 (revised edition, 83).

52. Rand, *We the Living*, 86 (revised edition, 83).

53. Rand, *We the Living*, 86 (revised edition, 83).

54. Rand’s view of the communists is epitomized by her portrayal of the scheming, thoroughly corrupt Pavel Syerov. For detailed discussion of Syerov, see Onkar Ghate, “The Death Premise in *We the Living* and *Atlas Shrugged*,” in Mayhew, *Essays on Ayn Rand’s We the Living*, 335–56.

55. Rand, *We the Living*, 314 (revised edition, 263).

56. Rand, “Our Cultural Value Deprivation,” 104.

57. Rand, *We the Living*, 427 (revised edition, 350).

58. Rand, *We the Living*, 445 (revised edition, 364).

59. Rand, *We the Living*, 335 (revised edition, 277).

60. The 1959 edition of the text changes “reason” to “purpose,” clarifying, in light of Rand’s more nuanced command of the language, what must have been the intended meaning all along. See Rand, *We the Living*, sixtieth anniversary edition, 277.

61. Rand, *We the Living*, 501 (revised edition, 408).

62. Perhaps advances in genetic engineering could bring the gruesome scenarios Andrei projects as impossible into the realm of possibility. Even so, Rand’s point, I take it, would be that there are *some* underlying principles of human biological development that are immutable, and that would govern even the possibilities for the genetic alteration of human beings.

63. See Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, third edition, translated by James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 37. (The material appears on page 430 of the standard, Prussian Academy Edition of Kant’s works, the pagination of which is given in the margins of most English translations of Kant.)

64. I have discussed the issue of the spiritual costs of collectivism in the context of Rand’s fiction, but Rand drew the background for *We the Living* according to her own experience of life under the Soviet regime, so, in this regard, the novel’s critique of collectivism has a factual basis. See, in this connection, Rand’s letters to her literary agent at the time, Jean Wick, dated March 23 and October 27, 1934, in Berliner, *Letters*, 4–6 and 17–19.

65. Ayn Rand, *Ideal*, in *Early Ayn Rand*, 209–90; see 280.

66. Rand, *Ideal*, 246.

67. Composition book from 1934. Entry dated May 9, 1934. Ayn Rand Archives. Safe #2, item #64. See also Harriman, *Journals*, 69.

68. I do not mean to suggest that we learn all there is to know about healthy stomachs before we learn anything about diseased ones. Clearly, our knowledge of health and our knowledge of disease develop in tandem. Rather, the point is that disease can only be conceptualized as a departure from health, and so we must have at least some minimal conception of health in place, in a given area of study, before we can begin to conceptualize any of the various forms of disease.

69. For Plato's account, see the discussion of the Form of the Good in Book VI of the *Republic*; and for Moore's, see G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903), chapter 1.

70. Notebook, "Second Hand Lives," pp. 2–4. Ayn Rand Collection of the Ayn Rand Archives. Box 457. S.2-66A/A.

71. As with *We the Living*, I rely here on the first edition of *Anthem* (London: Cassell and Co., 1938). The novelette was published in the United States, with significant revisions, in 1946. The current edition of the work contains the 1946 edition, followed by a facsimile of the 1938 edition with Rand's handwritten changes. I will give page references for *Anthem* parenthetically in the text, showing first the relevant page(s) in the 1938 edition and then, following a slash, the page(s) in the current edition where the 1938 material is reprinted. Thus (5/111) would refer to page 5 of the 1938 edition, which appears at page 111 of the current edition.

72. That is to say, if a way of life *itself* results in suffering and lack of joy, this indicates a defect in that way of life. The normative view of life would not entitle us to conclude that a person's way of life was defective merely because the person had suffered, since some suffering is caused by "accidental" circumstances, such as the death of a loved one, rather than by anything inherent in the way in which one has chosen to live or in the social conditions in which one lives. And, of course, it may be difficult in particular cases to untangle the different effects on a person's overall emotional state of accidental factors, social conditions, and his own choices concerning how to live. But in principle the normative view of life tells us that, accidental factors aside, proper individual choices and proper social conditions will be conducive to happiness rather than suffering.

73. Why does Equality's observation of the suffering endured by his more obedient "brothers" not cause him to question the moral code of his society? He is aware that "[a]ll is not well with our brothers" (53/159) early on, and seems to see a connection between their problems and the rules of the society, which require everyone to agree with one another (54/160). Perhaps at this point the evidence is not sufficient for him to conclude that there is any *basic* problem with the way his society is structured, especially given the distorted picture of history the leaders of his society have inculcated.