Chapter Nineteen

The Death Premise in *We the Living* and *Atlas Shrugged*

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In her foreword to the revised edition of *We the Living*, written a year after the publication of *Atlas Shrugged*, Ayn Rand explains that the basic theme of *We the Living* is the supreme value of human life (xiii). At the time of writing the novel, she knew that reverence for one's own life is the "fundamental characteristic of the best among men" and that its absence in an individual's soul "represents some enormous evil which had never been identified" (xiv). This evil, she already grasped, is what produces dictatorship, collectivism, and all other forms of human evil. But she did not yet understand the full nature of this evil nor, especially, how an individual could descend to such a subhuman level. She discovered *that* while writing *Atlas Shrugged.*

> In *Atlas Shrugged* I explain the philosophical, psychological and moral meaning of the men who value their own lives and of the men who don't. I show that the first are the Prime Movers of mankind and that the second are metaphysical killers, working for an opportunity to become physical ones. In *Atlas Shrugged*, I show *why* men are motivated either by a life premise or a death premise. In *We the Living*, I show only that they are. (xiv)

To be on the life premise is to be motivated by the values life requires. To be on the death premise is to be motivated by the destruction of the values life requires. I will explore some of what *We the Living* already reveals about the death premise and some of what Rand went on to identify about the premise's nature—particularly its root cause—in *Atlas Shrugged.*

In *We the Living*, one might say, Rand is the policeman surveying the criminal and gathering evidence about his habits, patterns, and actions. In *Atlas Shrugged*, she is the detective piecing together all the evidence, explaining the nature of the crime, and exposing the criminal's means and motive. It is startling, however, how much Rand already understood about the criminal in writing *We the Living*—and startling how much more she was to discover about his nature by the time she created *Atlas Shrugged.*

To capture in this chapter both of these aspects, I will begin with an overview of Rand's understanding of collectivism as an ideology of death in *We the Living*, and then narrow the focus to the character of Pavel Syerov, one of the principal villains in the novel. I will compare Syerov to the principal villain in *Atlas Shrugged*, James Taggart. The similarities, we will see, are revealing. Both men are on the death premise. But only Rand's characterization of Taggart in *Atlas Shrugged* (a characterization that has greater depth than that of Syerov in *We the Living*) exposes the root cause of the men who are on the death premise.

What *We the Living* does show is that there is such a thing as the death premise. The collectivism of communism—the attempt to tie all individuals together and make them "brothers," "comrades," "equals"—*means* destruction and death, particularly the destruction and death of the best individuals, those who strive to grow, to produce, to live. And the novel shows that contrary to the protests of any genuinely idealistic communists, this is what communism (and any other form of collectivism) *must* lead to in practice. Most of communism's leaders, the story makes clear, at some level know this. They pursue collectivism's destructive goal without the excuse of honest error.

Andrei Taganov represents the idealistic communist. You "were the best your Party had to offer the world," the novel's heroine, Kira Argounova, rightly tells him (358). The root of Andrei's idealism is his intellectual honesty: he takes ideas seriously. Kira, for instance, is surprised to find that he is the only one with whom she can discuss ideas (217). Andrei thinks that communism, by removing undesirable, evil elements from society and bringing "equality" to all men, will raise everyone up to the level of the highest individual. Although Andrei dislikes what most people actually make of their lives, he tells Kira that he does not have "the luxury of loathing. I'd rather try to make them worth looking at, to bring them up to my level" (90). In response to Kira's question that his cause therefore is to deny his own life for the sake of millions, Andrei answers "No. To bring millions up to where I want them—for my sake" (89).

Rand, when analyzing the Left years later, commented that the goal of "equal prosperity" for all gave superficial plausibility to the ideology of collectivism.[1] If Andrei's error in being seduced by communism is an honest error, as the novel portrays it to be, then this superficial plausibility is a significant part of the explanation.[2] But the fact remains that the egalitarianism at the heart of collectivism cannot, and is not meant to, lift people up. As Rand wrote more than thirty years after publishing *We the Living*, equality of results (as opposed to equality of individual rights before the law) could be achieved in only two ways: "either by raising all men to the mountaintop—or by razing the mountains."[3] The first method, however, is *metaphysically* impossible, since individuals have different attributes and abilities and make different choices. So the only actual meaning of a crusade for equality of results is a crusade to level society by pulverizing the mountains.[4] Not surprisingly, therefore, this is what is portrayed in page after page of *We the Living*. This massive injustice—this metaphysical inversion, the attempt to exist in defiance of a basic, unalterable fact of reality—is what Kira senses is so evil about the collectivism of communism. "I loathe your ideals," she tells Andrei, "because I know no worse injustice than the giving of the undeserved. Because men are not equal in ability and one can't treat them as if they were" (90).

At this point in the story Andrei does not yet grasp that his quest for equality commits him to razing the mountains. But what *We the Living* makes evident from the start is that even the best of the communists, individuals like Andrei and Stepan Timoshenko, have *no* positive program to offer the world as to how they are going to raise men to the mountaintops. Andrei and Stepan are warriors; force is what they wield. Stepan tells Andrei that they "poured blood" to "wash a clean road for freedom"—but what neither he nor Andrei can describe is the actual road to freedom (321). They think that if they dispose of the czar and defeat the White Army, that if they put bullets into capitalists and private traders—individuals who dare to scale the mountain alone and who in doing so supposedly exploit the rest of the people—then, somehow, all other men will be able to ascend together to the mountaintop. It does not happen.

By chaining men to one another, by preventing any individual from rising alone—an individual who could serve as an example for others to admire, learn from, and emulate—

communism reduces men to the lowest common denominator. This is one of the particularly dehumanizing aspects of collectivism, something the reader observes throughout the world of *We the Living* and something that more than one character bemoans. “We’re all turning into beasts in a beastly struggle,” the former owner of a prosperous fur business tells Kira (257).

The background of Soviet society presented in *We the Living*, an element so crucial to the story, makes it clear that Andrei and Stepan have not simply failed to understand an element of communism. The communist ideology offers *no* reason to think that collectivism can raise people up. All communism appeals to is force, the power of destruction. Like every other version of collectivism, communism can specify no means, just a magical “somehow” of how brute force will produce achievement. A set of posters described early in the novel eloquently captures this aspect of collectivism’s nature. “COMRADES! WE ARE THE BUILDERS OF A NEW LIFE!” one of the posters declares. How is this building of a “new life” to be accomplished? By the destruction wrought by egalitarian leveling: the poster depicts “a husky worker whose huge boots crushed tiny palaces.” The unavoidable, inhuman consequence of this leveling is announced by the second poster: “LICE SPREAD DISEASE! CITIZENS, UNITE ON THE ANTI-TYPHUS FRONT.” (30–31)

Andrei and Stepan have no, *and could have no*, positive program to offer to the world, to offer to those individuals like Kira, who want to live. Nevertheless, Andrei’s and Stepan’s error, though massive, is honest. Consequently, they are both horrified by what they have wrought. “We were to raise men to our own level,” a disillusioned Andrei tells Kira. “But they don’t rise, the men we’re ruling, they don’t grow, they’re shrinking. They’re shrinking to a level no human creatures ever reached before” (334).[5] For Andrei, this growing glimpse of the truth (which Kira’s example is helping him to understand) leads him to question his ideals.

But the vast majority of communists, represented by Andrei’s foil, Pavel Syerov, already know that there is nothing in communism or collectivism to raise men up. Unlike Andrei or Stepan, they are not deceived into believing that collectivism will create a better world for mankind, yet they embrace collectivism nevertheless. For them, destruction and the breaking of people’s lives is not a painful but unavoidable step to a noble goal. For them, destruction and the breaking of people’s lives seem to *be* the goal.

The awareness, callous indifference, and even zeal on the part of communism’s true practitioners toward the suffering and deaths they cause is made chillingly vivid in the novel. Whereas Stepan is distraught at the suffering he has brought, at seeing a woman starving on the street, coughing blood, Syerov thinks that the individuals waiting three hours in his office, reduced by collectivism to the state of having to beg Syerov for permission to live, should “go to hell” (321, 288).

There is not one genuine achievement on the part of the communists to speak of in *We the Living*. But observe the energy with which they trample lives. During the Purge, for instance, the communist leaders gleefully toss students out of the universities—not because of a student’s poor grades but because of a student’s unchosen relationships (who his parents were, what his father did for a living, etc.). What is to become of these discarded individuals? The communists know but don’t care. How can the country progress when its best and most eager minds have been starved—minds like Leo’s and Kira’s? The communists again don’t care (209–14). Sonia, to take another example, relishes going after Kira, stripping Kira of the job Andrei obtained for her in the “House of the Peasant,” even though that job itself was already mind destroying (Kira is forced to mouth collectivist dogma). Kira’s destruction is not proceeding quickly enough for Sonia’s liking (190–225). And for political reasons Victor Dunaev betrays Kira by arranging for

a proletarian, Marisha, to take over part of Kira's and Leo's living space; later, to further his party standing, Victor sends his own sister and her future husband to their deaths in Siberia (176–78, 339–54).

Perhaps the best example of the Communists' mentality in *We the Living*, though certainly not the most chilling, is their indifference to and outright contempt for Marisha. It is a compelling example because in this instance their destructive actions cannot be masked by the claim of being done to combat evil "enemies." Marisha is a member of the proletariat, supposedly someone in whose name the revolution was fought. But at the party to celebrate Victor and Marisha's marriage, the communists are unresponsive or hostile to her. She "wandered dejectedly through the crowd of guests. No one looked at her . . ." (301). Sonia admonishes her because "a true proletariat does not marry out of her class" (301). Victor seeks to exploit both her and her family. He does not love her but thinks her proletarian status will help him in the party: few will dare attack a man with a proletarian wife (300). When she, the devoted wife, tries to take his hand at the party, he jerks it away (301). Victor then makes a toast to "one of the first fighters for the triumph of the Worker-Peasant Soviets," his "beloved father-in-law, Glieb Ilyitch Lavrov!"—though it is clear that Victor knows nothing about the man nor wants to know (304). What motivates the Communists is not love for the proletariat.

As further evidence that the majority of Communists in *We the Living* embrace collectivism despite knowing that it will achieve nothing positive—which means that they embrace the power of destruction for its own sake—consider their contempt for their own, supposedly noble ideas. Victor's speech in which he toasts his father-in-law as "a man who has devoted his life to the cause," one of many such speeches from the Communists in the novel, is clearly fraudulent (304).[6] When Victor's father-in-law names what the Soviets are actually doing to the people—a fact obvious to anyone who chooses to recognize it—the Communists (except Andrei) do not wonder how they could have brought the country to such a state. They do not question their ideology. Instead, Syerov jumps up and shouts "Comrades, there are traitors even in the ranks of the workers!" (304). When Syerov and Sonia are alone and a pregnant Sonia continues to use the ideas of collectivism as a weapon, this time to chain Syerov in marriage, citing his duty "to the future citizen of our republic"—Syerov snaps at her "Cut that out! . . . You're not addressing a Club meeting" (317).

More generally, against the charge that the ideas of collectivism are not achieving the positive goals promised but actually the opposite—that the leaders of the party are holding on to power for its own sake—the Communist leadership demands that party members abandon ideas and become "flexible." We must not be "over-idealistic," it declares, the "new Communist is of rubber!" (309). And besides, what right does the individual have to his own convictions and the satisfaction of knowing that they are being realized? His duty is not to reach the truth but to obey the collective and its party "with absolute discipline" (309). A Communist like Andrei, therefore, who takes ideas seriously, is a severe threat to the destroyers populating the party. Andrei will hold the party accountable for its promises. So as the Sonias and Syerovs of the party scheme to consolidate their destructive power, Andrei is actually more of a danger to them than Kira is—which is why, Sonia knows, Andrei too must be destroyed (311).

We the Living exposes the communists for what history has revealed them to be: destroyers pursuing destruction. Syerov and the majority of other Communists in the novel are after the power to control and break lives, without even the pretense of honest error. To them, ideas are only tools to further their desire to destroy. *We the Living*, in other words, presents the death premise in action.

But a question remains: How could someone descend to such a depraved state? *We the Living* does present some of the evidence necessary to understand the soul of a man on the death premise; but a reader who lacks Rand's power of philosophical analysis must turn to *Atlas Shrugged* to understand the full meaning of that evidence.[7] To appreciate that both of these points are true, let us compare the character of Pavel Syerov in *We the Living* to that of James Taggart in *Atlas Shrugged.* The similarities between the two, as I previously remarked, are fascinating. But only the more penetrating presentation of Taggart's soul—when seen in contrast to the souls of the heroes of *Atlas Shrugged*—unveils the cause that produces a metaphysical killer.[8]

Let us begin with Syerov's childhood—which is presented in contrast to Andrei's (104–13). Apparent from the outset is Syerov's need to feel superior to other people. He looks down upon Andrei because of Andrei's ragged clothes (Andrei wraps his feet in newspaper to stay warm) (106). When Syerov later clerks in a men's store, he can get his hands on leather shoes and eau-de-cologne; in his mind, this makes him stand above poor workers like Andrei. When Syerov dances with the girls, he likes to tell them "We're not a commoner, dearie. We're a gentleman" (107). Later, he loses his job and has to take work at the factory. At first he is ashamed of his new status. But then he "learns" from communism the nobility of being a poor worker. He can now pass by an old friend "haughtily, as if he had inherited a title" (107). Syerov, however, now resents Andrei's higher (earned) status in the party and resents having to take orders from him (107).[9]

Abstract ideas, it is important to note, are from an early age meaningless to Syerov. They are not means of knowing reality but devices to maintain status. He attends church, immaculately groomed and sneering at Andrei's clothes, in order to study "God's Law"—and steals perfumed soap when he gets the urge. Later, as indicated, Syerov latches on to Marxism, not because he believes its ideas are true and good, as does Andrei (who studies intently), but because Marxism permits Syerov to maintain his image of superiority when he finds himself doing (supposedly) menial work. In the factory, Syerov comes to speak "of the superiority of the proletariat over the paltry petty bourgeoisie, according to Karl Marx" (107).

At both the mental and physical levels, Syerov disdains effort. Intellectually, he does not care to discover whether the ideas he picks up are true or false. Existentially, he expects to obtain things undeserved. In the February Revolution of 1917, Andrei fights for the cause he believes in; Syerov stays home, because "he had a cold" (107). But when the party seizes power in October of that year, both men are in the streets. In the battle of Melitopol, Andrei risks his life to convince the soldiers he is fighting of the rightness of communism's goal, passionately arguing that they should join his cause. Syerov is nowhere to be seen. But when Andrei's gambit achieves victory, Syerov jumps into the trenches, climbs a pile of sacks, and preaches communist slogans he does not believe, in order to aid his ascent to power (108–9). Notice too that Andrei promises the soldiers of the White Army a better life if they join his cause. Syerov promises them the glee of destroying life (the life of so-called undesirables). "Down with the damn bourgeoisie exploiters!" Syerov shouts. "Loot the looters, comrades!" (109).

James Taggart's childhood is depicted in similar terms, and is presented in contrast to Francisco d'Anconia's.[10] Taggart's early need to feel superior is as striking as Syerov's. He looks down upon the adolescent Francisco for taking supposedly menial jobs, such as a callboy at Taggart Transcontinental and a cabin boy aboard a cargo steamer. "So that's how you spend your winter?" Taggart declares with a smile touched by triumph, "the triumph of finding cause to feel contempt."[11] Francisco, by contrast, is focused on achieving things in the world, not on

comparing himself to others.[12] When Taggart has difficulty driving a motorboat, his reaction is not to try to learn how to do it, but to yell at Francisco: "Do you think you can do it any better?"[13] Taggart seems wounded by Francisco's mere presence, often staring at him intensely from a distance. He resents Francisco's ability and loathes the idea of learning from Francisco (just as Syerov loathed the idea of taking orders and learning from Andrei). "It's disgusting," Taggart tells his sister Dagny (another of the heroes of *Atlas Shrugged*), "the way you let that conceited punk order you about."[14]

Abstract ideas are meaningless in Taggart's mind just as they were in Syerov's. Abstract ideas serve merely as a tool to keep people down. Whereas Francisco is devoted to knowledge—one of his childhood mottoes is "Let's find out"—Taggart is uninterested in discovering and exploring the world.[15] When Taggart goes off to college, his studies produce not knowledge but "a manner of odd, quavering belligerence, as if he had found a new weapon."[16] Taggart then proceeds to denounce Francisco for his selfishness and greed, declaring that Francisco has social responsibilities, that the fortune Francisco is going to inherit is just a trust held for those in need. Taggart's newfound ideas have given him the permission and the means, in Syerov's words, to "loot the looters."

The young Taggart is also profoundly anti-effort. Intellectually, as we have seen, ideas are simply weapons to him. In the realm of physical matter, he craves the unearned. Francisco thinks he must study and work his way to the top of d'Anconia Copper, but Taggart expects the railroad, Taggart Transcontinental, to be handed to him, undeserved.[17] Francisco is focused on discovering and making things, and laughs because he sees the possibility of something much greater. Taggart stands off at a distance and never partakes in any of the projects or adventures that Francisco and Dagny embark on; he ridicules Francisco for his relentless effort and laughs "as if he wanted to let nothing remain great."[18]

Fast-forwarding to their adult lives, Syerov and Taggart continue to exhibit the same characteristics, but in more developed form. As an adult, Syerov experiences a deeper sense of inferiority and therefore a greater need to feel superior. At his party to celebrate his scheme with the unscrupulous speculator Morozov, Syerov announces to no one in particular, his fist waved menacingly at the room: "Think I'm a piker, don't you? . . . A measly piker . . . Well, I'll show you . . ." (289). He then whines to his future wife, Sonia, that he is a great man, but depressed because no one appreciates him (291). To alleviate his sense of emptiness, he will ascend to power and keep people down. "I'm going to make the foreign capitalists look like mice," he tells Sonia. "I'm going to give orders to Comrade Lenin himself" (291).

Clearly, ideas are only a tool of domination for the adult Syerov. He gives countless speeches preaching the goals of the party and the ideas of communism, but, as discussed above, he does not believe a word of what he says. Recall that when Sonia brings up collectivist ideas in private, Syerov tells her to "Cut that out!" (317).

The adult Syerov is devoid of positive effort. He has no constructive purpose or goal to achieve in reality. Unlike Andrei, Syerov does not believe in the ideas of communism and is not working to advance them. The few times we witness Syerov by himself, outside of party life, he consequently is aimless and lifeless. For instance, at the party he throws after launching his scheme with Morozov, Syerov invites guests he does not like or want to see and then, at the actual party, stammers around drunk (288–92). Later, when we see him at home, alone with his wife, Sonia, Syerov is lying down, chewing sunflower seeds, and spitting the shells into a pile on a discarded newspaper, indifferent to having a child or even to the effort of naming it; in short, "Pavel Syerov looked bored" (409–10).

The only thing that rouses Syerov to action is the opportunity to use party power to trample lives—which allows him to rise higher in the party and gain even more power to trample even more lives. He appears purposeful only when his purpose is to destroy. We first meet Syerov when he is converting ideas into daggers, preaching that science is not objective but "a weapon of the class struggle" (71). In the face of student opposition to communist dogma, Syerov intimates that at the front, his gang would simply have put bullets into his opponents' brains (72). He zealously pursues the capture and imprisonment of Leo Kovalensky, even though it is not his job to do so, because such a coup would win him more power from the party (101–4). He eagerly participates in the purge to kick Kira, Leo, and other promising minds out from the universities (209–11). By the final scene in the novel involving Syerov and Andrei, it is clear that all Syerov cares for is the power to dominate (415–16).

It would be a mistake to think that because Syerov sometimes chases after money, money is a positive value to him. When he sets up the illegal scheme with Morozov, the money Syerov obtains is not a token of any positive achievement on his part nor will it serve as fuel for any subsequent achievement in his life. It represents only the power to control and crush lives. After the scheme is set up and the money is coming in, Syerov drunkenly shouts to the guests at his party that he "can buy you all, guts and souls!" (290). He feels the need to celebrate his scheme with his own kind, but (when sober) does not dare admit to himself what it is that he wants to celebrate. "What'll we celebrate?" his Communist friend asks him when Syerov proposes the party. "Never mind," Syerov answers. "Just celebrate" (288). It is not achievement that moves Syerov or which he wants to celebrate, it is destruction.

The adult James Taggart displays the same characteristics—but in far sharper relief. Like the adult Syerov, a deep sense of inferiority haunts the adult Taggart: he feels an intense need to be a big shot. Late in *Atlas Shrugged*, for instance, he boasts to his wife, Cherryl, that the impending nationalization of d'Anconia Copper that he has helped cook up is a great business deal—bigger than what anyone has dreamed of before. He tells her that she has no idea how big a man she has married. He gloats that Hank Rearden is a great man (Rearden, a great industrialist, is another of the heroes of *Atlas Shrugged*), but that *he*, James Taggart, has beaten both Rearden and Francisco. And Taggart, just like Syerov, whines to his wife—as he senses his own impotence and inner emptiness—that he is misunderstood, that no one loves him for himself.[19]

Abstract ideas have cemented into a weapon for the adult James Taggart, devoid of cognitive meaning. (They play another crucial role for him, mentioned later.) Early in the novel, he uses the logically indefinable notions of the public interest and social responsibility to destroy a competing railroad, the Phoenix-Durango. These moral dogmas, he senses, can sanction any destructive act: "People who are afraid to sacrifice somebody," Taggart drawls, "have no business talking about a common purpose."[20] Late in the novel, he is using the same sort of ideas to seize industrial property south of the border and destroy d'Anconia Copper through nationalization. "It's a deal with a mission—a worthy, public-spirited mission," he tells Cherryl, though he is now having trouble even half pretending that he believes what he is saying.[21]

The adult James Taggart, like Syerov, is devoid of any positive purpose or ambition. Though he is head of Taggart Transcontinental, he does not value industry or technology; he makes no effort to improve the efficiency or management of the railroad. When we witness Taggart outside of Taggart Transcontinental and outside of his scrambles for political pull, he is even more aimless and lifeless than Syerov is. There is no better illustration of this than the beginning of the brief scene between Taggart and the society girl Betty Pope.[22] At twenty past

noon, Taggart stumbles into the living room in his pajamas, in order to find out what time it is, but he cannot be bothered to locate his watch. As he feels a drunken headache coming on, he forgets why he is in the living room. He glances at Betty Pope's clothes strewn across the floor, and wonders why he slept with her; but he cannot be bothered to discover an answer. To him the sexual act has no personal meaning or purpose—he sleeps with women because that is what is done.

What arouses the adult James Taggart (as was the case with the adult Syerov) is only the opportunity to demolish. In this scene with Betty Pope, for instance, the only thing that catches Taggart's interest and makes him act is the opportunity to undermine Dagny. At the board meeting that afternoon, which he starts getting dressed for, he is "putting the skids" under his sister.[23] *This* is what gives him something to celebrate over dinner. In his role as head of Taggart Transcontinental, he does not advance the railroad, he harms it. He constantly places obstacles in front of Dagny and her business partners. Early in the story, he pours money down the San Sebastian Line despite Dagny's objections; he kills the Phoenix-Durango, Taggart Transcontinental's competitor in Colorado, even though Dagny knows that this will make running their own Colorado line harder, not easier; and he opposes the use of Rearden Metal, which could save the railroad. Unable to conceive that his goal might be destruction, Dagny wonders aloud to Rearden why her brother seems to actively try to harm Rearden's business. Toward the end of the story, Taggart is busy annihilating d'Anconia Copper.[24]

Again, it would be a mistake to think that because Taggart sometimes scurries after money, money represents a value to him. Taggart, like Syerov, concocts schemes to obtain money unearned, such as blindly investing in the San Sebastian Mines of d'Anconia Copper.[25] But money obtained in this way is neither the product of nor the fuel for any positive achievement on Taggart's part. Taggart himself begins to realize this when he is reflecting on his greatest "stunt," the nationalization of d'Anconia Copper.[26] "No—he thought bleakly, in reluctant admission—money meant nothing to him any longer. He had thrown dollars about by the hundreds. . . ."[27] Like Syerov in regard to the scheme with Morozov, Taggart wants to celebrate his greatest stunt. But Taggart also dares not admit what it is that he actually wants to celebrate—because it is not the achievement that earned money represents. "He . . . could not admit that the particular pleasure he wanted was that of celebration, because he could not admit what it was that he wanted to celebrate."[28]

In a more pronounced form than in Syerov's case, what moves James Taggart is not the quest for achievement but for destruction.

To be on the life premise is to be moved by the purpose of achieving the values necessary to sustain and foster life. To be on the death premise is to be moved by the purpose of destroying the values life requires. Clearly, neither Syerov nor Taggart is on the life premise. Neither is concerned with how to reach genuine values, such as how to *make* money—yet life is impossible without value-achievement. Neither formulates positive goals—yet life requires that an individual define and then pursue the personal goals that will bring him success and happiness. Neither is prepared to exert the effort to reach goals—yet the exertion of effort is inherent to the life process. Clearly, from the evidence presented in both *We the Living* and *Atlas Shrugged*, neither Syerov nor Taggart is concerned with the task of living.

But more evil than that, each man relishes the smashing of values and lives, Syerov the smashing of the values and lives of individuals like Kira and Leo, and Taggart the smashing of the values and lives of individuals like Dagny and Rearden and Francisco. The central villain in both *We the Living* and *Atlas Shrugged*, therefore, is on the death premise. But it is only in *Atlas*

Shrugged that Rand fully understood and named the fundamental premises and choices that produce so brutalized a human being as a man on the death premise.[29] This newfound knowledge, as we will now see, explains—despite the similarities already noted—the vast difference between the characterization of Pavel Syerov in *We the Living* and that of James Taggart in *Atlas Shrugged*.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to analyze fully the death premise as presented in *Atlas Shrugged*, or even as presented only through the character of James Taggart. The entire story focuses on the difference between those on the life premise and those on the death premise. Liberation and justice come to the heroes only when they understand fully the meaning of the life premise (which, implicitly, had always been their moving principle) and grasp the nature of the premise that guides their enemies.[30] To delimit the issue, I will restrict my focus to one fundamental aspect: the basic choice that separates a Kira Argounova from a Pavel Syerov, a Dagny Taggart (and the other heroes of *Atlas Shrugged*) from a James Taggart. Note that it will be necessary to understand the root of the life premise in order to understand the root of its opposite.

According to *Atlas Shrugged*, the source of the life and death premises is the primary choice an individual faces, the essence of man's free will: the choice to think or not. The choice to think or not is the choice to focus one's mind or not—the choice to exert the mental effort necessary to be conscious of reality at the abstract, conceptual level of awareness, or not—the choice to activate one's reason or not. The choice to think or not, in Rand's words, is a man's choice to "focus his mind to a full, active, purposefully directed awareness of reality—or . . . [to] unfocus it and let himself drift in a semiconscious daze, merely reacting to any chance stimulus of the immediate moment."[31] John Galt declares to a dying world that this is the fundamental choice it faces:

> [T]o think is an act of choice. The key to what you so recklessly call "human nature," the open secret you live with, yet dread to name, is the fact that *man is a being of volitional consciousness.* Reason does not work automatically; thinking is not a mechanical process; the connections of logic are not made by instinct. The function of your stomach, lungs or heart is automatic; the function of your mind is not. In any hour and issue of your life, you are free to think or to evade that effort.[32]

The protagonists in Rand's novels choose to think consistently and as a way of life. What unites Kira, Leo, and Andrei, for example, is that they are all active thinkers. From age ten, Kira chooses the demanding career of an engineer and then studies passionately in the attempt to achieve her goal (41). More generally, outside of her chosen field of study, she thinks about life and values—about what life is, what things make it possible, and what things destroy it. She thinks about these issues in a way that few other individuals in her society choose to do. This is what allows her to grasp, for instance, that both collectivism's means and its ends are horrific (88–91). Leo too grasps the evil of collectivism because he thinks about it, and he too is devoted to his studies. A touching scene early in the novel, highlighting the unspoken intimacy between Kira and Leo, is when we witness them at home, not talking much but working and studying, immersed in books and charts and blueprints (136–37). (Contrast this scene of domestic life with the one between Syerov and Sonia, mentioned above.) Andrei too embraces mental effort and the responsibility of reaching the truth; unlike other Communists, as already indicated, Andrei takes ideas seriously. In childhood, he teaches himself to write and studies late into the night, even

though it is frowned upon (105–6). He discusses ideas with Kira and does what he does in the service of communism because he is convinced he is right (217, 89). Later, as he learns from Kira's life and example, he questions and judges his party, and when he has gathered sufficient evidence of its evil and his massive error, he changes course.

In *Atlas Shrugged*, more obviously and more emphatically than in *We the Living*, the heroes are thinkers. Dagny, Rearden, Francisco, and Galt spend prodigious amounts of time studying, working on problems, making discoveries, and figuring out new ways of doing things. Against the unthinking, evasive opposition of James Taggart and the other looters, for instance, Dagny keeps the trains running and ensures that the John Galt Line is built. Rearden creates Rearden Metal and discovers a way to combine a truss and an arch to create a new kind of bridge. Francisco designs a new copper smelter. Galt invents a motor.[33]

They exert this same heroic mental effort outside of work. How does Rearden, for instance, trapped as a result of his own errors in a family life that brings him only boredom and pain, manage to free himself? By constantly *thinking* about his life and family, about what they want, about what they are after, about what premises and motives move them.[34] Or how does Galt, when he hears himself sentenced to slavery at the Twentieth Century Motor Company by virtue of his ability, resist? By *thinking* about what philosophical and moral theory, deployed in what manner and counting on what unnamed factor, could produce such monstrous injustice—and then originating a revolutionary new philosophy and moral code.[35]

But in *Atlas Shrugged*, unlike in *We the Living* (when Rand had not yet formulated her theory of free will), the root choice that produces a thinker is essential to the novel's characterization (as well as its theme and plot) and therefore stressed. The heroes are individuals who deliberately choose to place nothing above their awareness of reality. This fact is particularly stressed in Galt's character. When Dagny meets Galt for the first time after crashing in the hidden valley, she sees "a face that had nothing to hide or to escape, a face with no fear of being seen or of seeing, so that the first thing she grasped about him was the intense perceptiveness of his eyes—he looked as if his faculty of sight were his best loved tool. . . ."[36] Later, when Dagny momentarily wishes that she could remain in the valley without hearing about the disintegration of Taggart Transcontinental, Galt (who passionately wants her to stay) tells her in a "ruthless tone, peculiarly his, which sounded implacable by being simple, devoid of any emotional value, save the quality of respect for facts," that she will hear of *every* train wreck, abandoned line, and collapsed bridge. "Nobody," he says, "stays in this valley except by a full, conscious choice based on a full, conscious knowledge of every fact involved in his decision. Nobody stays here by faking reality in any manner whatever."[37]

When Galt is captured and a string of enemies beg and threaten him to become economic dictator of the nation, the contrast in mental functioning is striking. Galt chooses to face facts and place no consideration above the facts; to him, abstract knowledge is the indispensable means by which one understands reality and acts within it. Galt knows that nothing can save the looters' system, that they have no value to offer him, and he never pretends otherwise. The moochers and looters, on the other hand, go through various mental contortions to try to twist the facts to fit their desires. Words, to them, are ways of circumventing reality.[38]

Given the plot and narrative structure of *Atlas Shrugged*, however, it is Dagny's and Rearden's inner thoughts and choices that the reader is privy to, not Francisco's or Galt's. Consequently, Dagny and Rearden are the two characters who furnish the best introspective evidence for Rand's view of the root of the life premise.

There is one constant in Dagny's and Rearden's inner life: they *choose* to think. *However* difficult the issue, *however* painful the subject, they choose—across hours, days, and decades—to exert the mental effort required to reach truth. Consider, for instance, the scene when Dagny has quit because of Directive 10-289 (the moratorium on brains) and is staying at a cabin in the mountains in order to think what to do next. She struggles with the issue, trying to understand how she can go on without a purpose, unable to see how she can live without Taggart Transcontinental and yet unable to see how she can serve it under the looters' directives; she struggles, trying to find an answer she cannot find.[39]

Or consider the description of Rearden creating, through countless dead ends and late nights, spread across the span of ten years, Rearden Metal.[40] That brief passage is a description of a mind that chooses to think.

Or consider Rearden when he is being blackmailed into signing the "Gift Certificate" surrendering Rearden Metal to the looters. He does not wail at the massive injustice. Instead, against enormous pain he *thinks* how his premises and choices could have led him down a road to where his one great achievement—his romance with Dagny—could be used to destroy his other great achievement, Rearden Metal. "It was as if some voice were telling him sternly: This is the time—the scene is lighted—now look. And standing naked in the great light, he was looking quietly, solemnly, stripped of fear, of pain, of hope, with nothing left to him but the desire to know."[41]

The essence of the choice Dagny and Rearden continually make is named when Dagny falls asleep in Rearden's lap, emotionally spent after appearing on Bertram Scudder's radio program to proudly confess her affair with Rearden: Dagny is described as surrendering the responsibility of consciousness.[42] To choose, when awake, the responsibility of consciousness—*that* is what makes Rand's heroes, heroes.

That choice is what puts a man on the life premise. A thinker—*Atlas Shrugged* makes clear—is an individual devoted to life. The choice to think, to focus one's mind, to activate one's reason—is the only way one can come to know reality and successfully act in it. For "a human being," Galt says, "the question 'to be or not to be' is the question 'to think to not to think.'"[43]

A man on the death premise, a man like James Taggart (and by implication Pavel Syerov), makes the opposite choice. He defaults on the responsibility of consciousness. He consigns his mind to a void. Taggart cannot be bothered with expending the mental effort required to know and deal with reality. "Don't bother me, don't bother me, don't bother me" are Taggart's first words in the novel—and the key to his character.[44] When Eddie Willers, Dagny's assistant, opens Taggart's office door in this scene, Taggart has no idea whether Eddie is bringing good news or bad, but Taggart's response nevertheless is: "Don't bother me." Why? Although Taggart does not know what kind of a messenger Eddie is, at some level Taggart knows that Eddie is a messenger—a messenger from reality, presenting facts that may require processing, identification, evaluation, judgment, and/or decision on Taggart's part. *That* effort is what Taggart wishes to escape. He wants to coast mentally—as an unquestionable, unalterable absolute.

Thus whenever some element of reality potentially demands attention, thereby threatening his mental lethargy, Taggart's response is to push it out of his mind by rationalization and evasion. When Eddie in the above-mentioned scene tells Taggart that they have had another train wreck on the Rio Norte Line, Taggart dismisses it by saying that "accidents happen every day"—as though a railroad can do nothing about accidents on its lines.[45] By creating the illusion that corrective action is futile, Taggart can pretend that no thought or effort could fix the problem

and so no thought or effort is required of him. When Taggart glimpses a possible solution to the problem—repairing the Rio Norte Line with track from Rearden Steel—he deliberately jettisons it from his consciousness. "Whatever else you say," he tells Eddie, "there's one thing you are not going to mention next—and that's Rearden Steel."[46]

What Galt does for the first time is identify the mental act of evasion that Taggart and his ilk routinely practice: "the act of blanking out, the willful suspension of one's consciousness, the refusal to think—not blindness, but the refusal to see; not ignorance, but the refusal to know . . . the act of unfocusing [one's] mind and inducing an inner fog to escape the responsibility of judgment."[47] Galt knows that understanding the nature and meaning of this act is crucial to understanding the enemies of life, because it is the root of their evil.

The hidden premise behind evasion, Galt explains, is the metaphysical absurdity that the evader's consciousness can control existence. If the evader refuses to name a fact, then the fact does not exist. If Taggart refuses to admit that railroad accidents can be prevented, then they *are not* preventable. If Taggart refuses to admit that obtaining rail from Rearden Steel is the solution to the problems besetting the Rio Norte Line, then it *is not* the solution. In Taggart's mind, any fact and any danger will "remain unreal by the sovereign power of his wish not to see it—like a foghorn within him, blowing, not to sound a warning, but to summon the fog."[48]

In an evader's mind, his wish supersedes reality. Taggart wishes to be able to obtain a fortune without earning it—at the snap of his fingers—and reality should therefore fall in line. Taggart wants to be admired and loved without the responsibility of forming a soul that is admirable—and reality should therefore grant him his wish.[49] Late in the novel, he pleads with Dagny: "I *want* to be president of a railroad. I *want* it. Why can't I have my wish as you always have yours? Why shouldn't I be given fulfillment of my desires as you always fulfill any desire of your own?"[50] To place an "I wish" above an "It is"—that, Galt explains, is the essence of Taggart's mentality.[51]

Notice that this element also forms an aspect of Pavel Syerov's mentality, though it is not stressed in the way that it is in the depiction of James Taggart. Syerov too wants reality to bend to his wishes (a point easier to see with the hindsight made possible by the ideas dramatized in *Atlas Shrugged*). In planning a celebratory party after first cashing in on his illegal scheme with Morozov, Syerov declares that he should not have to worry about expenses when he wants to have a good time (288). Translated into the terms of *Atlas Shrugged*, this means: Syerov should not have to worry about the facts of reality when *he wishes* to have something. Furthermore, when Syerov's unearned money is unexpectedly cut off (Leo and Antonina Pavlovna have spent Syerov's share of the loot), Syerov can no longer effortlessly satisfy his whims. He cannot provide Sonia with a fur coat she does not deserve and he cannot provide a mistress with a bracelet he has not earned. What does this make Syerov feel? Rage, rage toward everything and everyone—he slams the phone down, smashes an inkstand, throws a crumpled letter in his secretary's face and tells a ragged-looking job applicant that he is going to be turned over to the secret police—rage toward existence, because it will no longer bend to his whims (365–66).

What a whim-worshipper like James Taggart or Pavel Syerov wants, fundamentally, is for the universe to be such that thought, purpose, and reason are not required in order to live in it. The whim-worshipper resents and rebels against existence and life: against the basic fact that effort is needed to conform to and remain in reality. This perverse wish, Galt explains, is "the whole of their shabby secret."[52]

But the universe, of course, does demand effort, purpose, thought, reason—if one wants to continue to exist in it. One's only choice is to accept this inexorable fact or die. No amount of

wishing or praying, of pretending or faking, of raging against the world or bewailing one's fate in it, can alter the fact that to reap a harvest one must first discover what seeds to plant, in what kind of soil and at what time of year; that to make money one must run a successful business, a business that produces a valuable product like Rearden Metal, not one that produces empty promises like the business of Taggart's friend Orren Boyle; that to be admired and loved one must achieve the virtues of character, such as rationality, honesty, and courage, that lead to admiration and love.

Earlier I observed that both Syerov and Taggart disdain effort. The root of that characteristic, the basic choice that produces it, should now be clear. I also observed that both Syerov and Taggart have a deep sense of inferiority. The root of that characteristic should now be clear as well: it is the same basic choice. Pavel Syerov *is* inferior to Andrei, Leo, and Kira. He lacks what they possess: the thought, the judgment, the mind necessary to understand the world and deal with it. James Taggart *is* inferior to Rearden, Dagny, and Francisco. He lacks what they possess: the thought, the judgment, the mind necessary to understand the world and succeed in it—the kind of mind that creates Rearden Metal, manages Taggart Transcontinental, or runs d'Anconia Copper.[53] What *Atlas Shrugged* makes almost self-evident is the explanation: the inferiority is self-made, self-chosen. In rejecting his mind, Taggart rejects his means of survival and turns himself into a subhuman creature.[54]

To rebel against the effort and thought needed to remain in existence is to *willfully* abandon the only road that leads to life and happiness. It is to embark, instead, on a road whose terminus is one's own death. To resent the requirements of reality is to resent one's *own* existence in it. The inhuman meaning of his basic choice, the anti-life meaning of his willful rejection of the responsibility of consciousness, is what a James Taggart dares not face. This is the key to understanding his lust for destruction.

To hide his death wish from himself (and others), a man like Taggart will at first *fake* concern with the values that sustain life. He will *imitate* the thinkers and achievers, the men of purpose, the men whose goal is life. He will try to get money or business success or pleasure or sex—so long as he can maintain the illusion that he can obtain these things without rational thought or real effort. Taggart wants to get money and become head of Taggart Transcontinental without studying or learning, and he wants to sleep with women without forming a soul that is desirable. Such things, he hopes, will prove that his basic choice to reject the responsibility of consciousness is equivalent to Rearden's and Francisco's choice to assume that responsibility, since the results are the same. Indeed, Taggart's basic choice, he feels, is superior to theirs, because it requires no effort while theirs does, yet the results remain the same. His wishing is superior to their thinking. Rearden and Francisco "'spend their lives grubbing for their fortunes penny by penny,'" he tells Cherryl, "'while I can do it like that'—he snapped his fingers—'just like that.'"[55] The unnamed absolute in Taggart's mind is the quest to show that the mindless is superior to the mind, that impotence is superior to ability, that a zero, somehow, is superior to an entity.[56]

But his faking does not work because it *cannot work.* The money he obtains is useless: it does not represent productive ability and he has no positive use for it. The admiration he receives is counterfeit: Cherryl loves him because she thinks he possesses Dagny's soul. The sex he engages in is meaningless: he gets no pleasure from sleeping with Betty Pope or even Cherryl. The unearned is at most a temporary escape from his self-created emptiness inside—until reality forces Taggart to face, in Galt's terms, the cause of the causeless.[57]

It is the productive effort of the Dagnys, Reardens, and Franciscos of the world that gives meaning to the dollar bills in Taggart's wallet and explains why others will accept the bills from him in exchange for a drink or a bite to eat. It is the virtue achieved by the Dagnys, Reardens, and Franciscos of the world that gives meaning to the concept of admiration. It is the souls created by the Dagnys and Reardens of the world—and the physical desires and responses that their souls create in one another—that gives spiritual meaning to the physical act of sex. The cause of the causeless—that is the inescapable fact which reality keeps forcing Taggart to try to escape.

Like a drug addict who needs greater and greater "fixes" to preserve the illusion that his problems are solved, the seeker of the unearned needs more and more grandiose schemes to pretend that the causeless in fact exists. Observe that at the beginning of the novel, Taggart is simply riding blindly on d'Anconia Copper, hoping to cash in effortlessly on Francisco's judgment in creating the San Sebastian Mines. Toward the end, in order to preserve the illusion of the causeless, Taggart must take over every industrial property south of the border and nationalize all of d'Anconia Copper. But it does not work. It does not get Taggart what he wants.

A fortune is not what Taggart is after; the pursuit of money merely camouflages his real motive. "Money," he thinks to himself late in the novel, as he contemplates the destruction of d'Anconia Copper, "had been his motive nothing worse. Wasn't that a normal motive? A valid one? Wasn't that what they all were after, the Wyatts, the Reardens, the d'Anconias?"[58] But money—as he is realizing in this scene—is really not his motive. If it were, he would have tried, as Francisco did, to discover how to *earn* it. The money in Taggart's wallet is supposed to serve as proof of the causeless, proof of the power of whim. He realizes that he "had thrown dollars about by the hundreds—at that party he had given today—for unfinished drinks, for uneaten delicacies, for unprovoked tips and unexpected whims . . . for the span of any moment, for the clammy stupor of knowing that it is easier to pay than think." Other people struggled against crippling, unjust regulations—railroads went bankrupt, factories went without transportation, young men gave up scientific careers to become dishwashers, and bankers committed suicide—so that "he, James Taggart, might sit in a private barroom and pay for the alcohol pouring down Orren Boyle's throat." But unearned money means "nothing to him any longer."[59] The prospect of stealing a fortune now leaves him indifferent. Why? Because whether Taggart is seeking simply to ride on Francisco's coattails, as he tried early in the novel, or to nationalize all of Francisco's property, as he tries late in the novel, what Taggart cannot escape is the fact that Francisco remains the cause of the supposedly causeless. Without Francisco, Taggart's whims are useless.[60]

Taggart cannot escape the metaphysical fact that the (supposedly) causeless is caused; his only recourse is to war against this fact. The cause of the causeless must be annihilated. In nationalizing d'Anconia Copper, Taggart does not actually want Francisco's fortune, he wants Francisco to lose it.[61]

What drives Taggart from beginning to end, therefore, is his root choice to rebel against the nature of existence. To escape the anti-life meaning of his rejection of his rational mind, he must obliterate the *causal* fact that life in reality demands rational thought. And thus a soul like Taggart's, Galt explains, comes to relish "the spectacle of suffering, of poverty, subservience and terror; these give him a feeling of triumph, a proof of the defeat of rational reality. But no other reality exists."[62] To escape his willful default, Taggart must destroy the power of reason—its life-giving power. If he can show reason to be impotent, then he cannot be reproached for willfully abandoning it; no one can say he is evil through and through.

Abstract ideas—anti-reason ones, especially the call for self-sacrifice and the morality of altruism, which Galt describes as the "Morality of Death"[63]—serve both as the principal cover and principal weapon for Taggart's lust to destroy. On the one hand, they tell him that his choice to reject his life is noble: it is evil to live for oneself, good to throw one's life away.[64] On the other hand, such abstract ideas sanction the destruction of rational men. You are greedy and selfish, you should lose your fortune—a young Taggart tells Francisco near the start of the novel. And near the end, Taggart shouts at Galt: "How can you be sure you're right? How can you *know*? Nobody can be sure of his knowledge! Nobody! You're no better than anyone else!"[65]

Taggart *must* destroy the products, the symbols, and the very lives of the rational men, the men who can live and who thus stand as a constant reminder and reproach to a soul that has chosen death. He must smash railroads and steel mills and copper mines, he must torture and torment souls like Cherryl's that are eager to exert the effort necessary to rise, he must see Galt die. The bitter intensity with which the adolescent James Taggart watched Francisco from a distance becomes the hatred with which the adult James Taggart watches Galt being tortured.[66] Taggart must kill, he must kill the good because it is good, he must "kill in order not to learn that the death he desires is his own."[67]

We have now uncovered the root of the death premise. In *We the Living*, Rand showed that there are individuals who embrace life and individuals who war against it. In *Atlas Shrugged* she shows why: a fundamental choice separates the two types of individual.

Ayn Rand already knew in *We the Living* that the life-haters did not deserve the excuse that their "noble" end justified their destructive means (89–90). The nature of their souls was much more evil than that. For some unnamed reason, death was their end. In *Atlas Shrugged*, she returns to this issue, but now with full understanding: "The truth about their souls is worse than the obscene excuse you have allowed them, the excuse that the end justifies the means and that the horrors they practice are means to nobler ends. The truth is that those horrors are their ends."[68] In *Atlas Shrugged*, she shows why.

And, thankfully, Ayn Rand does much more than that. *Atlas Shrugged* also reveals the root of Kira Argounova's soul—the intransigent devotion to effort, purpose, thought, and reason that is the intransigent devotion to life. Only this devotion to one's own life, *Atlas Shrugged* shows, can prevent the metaphysical killers who seized power in 1917 Russia from ever doing so again.

NOTES

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1. Ayn Rand, "The Left: Old and New," *Return of the Primitive: The Anti-Industrial Revolution* (New York: Meridian, 1999), 169. She writes: "At a superficial (a very superficial) glance, there might have been, for the morally indiscriminating, some plausibility in the notion of enslaving and sacrificing generations of men for the sake of establishing a permanent state of material abundance for all."

2. In his introduction to the sixtieth anniversary edition of *We the Living*, Leonard Peikoff describes Andrei as "totally honest" (vii).

3. Ayn Rand, "The Age of Envy," *Return of the Primitive*, 144.

4. Rand, "The Age of Envy," 144. In *Atlas Shrugged*, one of the whispered stories about the novel's foremost hero, John Galt, is that he discovered the fountain of youth. He "found it on the top of a mountain. It took him ten years to climb that mountain. It broke every bone in his body, it tore the skin off his hands, it made him lose his home, his name, his love. But he climbed it. He found the fountain of

youth, which he wanted to bring down to men. Only he never came back." Why? "Because he found that it couldn't be brought down." Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* (New York: Random House, 1957; Signet thirty-fifth anniversary paperback edition, 1992), 169.

5. For Stepan's disillusionment, see *We the Living*, 318–23.

6. For other examples of such speeches, see, for instance, the speeches made at Andrei's funeral (435–37).

7. I do not mean to imply that there is something deficient about *We the Living*. The story is complete and self-contained. Rand simply went on to discover more about the death premise, knowledge she used to construct the plot of *Atlas Shrugged.*

8. From here on in "Taggart" is used only to refer to James Taggart; "Dagny" or "Dagny Taggart" will be used to refer to his sister, Dagny Taggart.

9. Syerov's resentment of Andrei's status in the party runs through the novel; for instance, Syerov resents that Andrei intervenes when Syerov is questioning Kira about Leo (103).

10. Francisco d'Anconia, heir to the multinational conglomerate d'Anconia Copper, is one of the heroes of *Atlas Shrugged.*

11. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 91.

12. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 92.

13. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 91.

14. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 93.

15. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 93.

16. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 97.

17. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 98.

18. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 94.

19. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 800–1, 812–14.

20. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 50–51.

21. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 800.

22. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 71–73.

23. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 73.

24. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 56–59, 75–81, 27–28, 85, 796–97.

25. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 52.

26. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 800.

27. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 798.

28. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 796.

29. In her foreword to the revised edition of *We the Living*, Rand describes men on the death premise as brutalized (xiv).

30. Aside from *Atlas Shrugged*, the following nonfiction writings of Rand are very helpful in understanding her analysis of the death premise: "For the New Intellectual," *For the New Intellectual: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* (New York: Signet 1963), 10–57; "Philosophical Detection," *Philosophy: Who Needs It* (New York: Signet 1984), 12–22; "The Missing Link," *Philosophy: Who Needs It*, 25–45; "Selfishness Without a Self," *Philosophy: Who Needs It*, 46–51; and, especially, "The Age of Envy," 130–58. In this last essay, she describes the death premise as hatred of the good for being the good.

31. Ayn Rand, "The Objectivist Ethics," *The Virtue of Selfishness: A New Concept of Egoism* (New York: Signet, 1964), 22.

32. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 930. For more on Rand's theory of free will, see Galt's speech in *Atlas Shrugged*, 927–84 and "The Objectivist Ethics" in *Virtue of Selfishness*, 13–39, especially 19–24. See also Leonard Peikoff, *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* (New York: Meridian 1993), 55–72.

33. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 173–237; 35–36 and 203; 1073; 674–75.

34. See, for instance, Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 150–54.

35. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 927–84.

36. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 647.

37. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 732.
38. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 1008–18, 1022–25.
39. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 562–66.
40. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 35–36.
41. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 518.
42. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 796.
43. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 930.
44. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 15.
45. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 15.
46. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 16.
47. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 935.
48. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 799.
49. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 800, 813–14.
50. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 843. Of course the point is (as the verb tenses of the quoted passage make clear) that Dagny works to earn that which she wants while Taggart expects the unearned.
51. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 952–53.
52. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 952.
53. The issue of course is not whether Taggart possesses the superlative intelligence of a Francisco d'Anconia or only the average intelligence of an Eddie Willers; the issue is whether or not Taggart chooses to use the intelligence that he does possess.
54. See Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 972–73.
55. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 800.
56. See Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 954.
57. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 954.
58. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 797.
59. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 798.
60. Francisco, following Galt's lead, drives this lesson home to Taggart and the other looters by removing the supposedly nonexistent cause of the causeless. Francisco does not exercise his judgment: the San Sebastian Mines are worthless. Later, Francisco blows up whatever remains of d'Anconia Copper the moment before it is to be nationalized.
61. As Galt says, "They do not want to own your fortune, they want you to lose it" (Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 962).
62. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 962.
63. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 942.
64. As but one of many examples, one can see Taggart engaging in such a process of rationalization, now wearing thin, in a conversation with Cherryl toward the end of the story (Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 800).
65. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 1022. Rand discusses how irrational philosophical ideas (including altruism) can serve as means of rationalization in "Philosophical Detection," *Philosophy: Who Needs It*, 17–22.
66. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 93, 1048–53.
67. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 962.
68. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 962.