
Reason and Value: Aristotle versus Rand

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Objectivist Studies series editor:
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Objectivist Studies is a monograph series published by The Atlas Society. Founded in 1990 as the Institute for Objectivist Studies, and also formerly known as The Objectivist Center, TAS is a not-for-profit research organization for the study, development, and dissemination of Objectivism, the philosophy originated by Ayn Rand. Objectivism is a secular world view that stresses reason, individualism, respect for achievement, and liberty. The series is edited by William R Thomas.

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- Include an abstract and author's biography of no more than 250 words each.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Long, Roderick T., 1964–

Reason and Value: Aristotle versus Rand/Roderick T. Long

Includes bibliographic references (p. 56)

ISBN 1-57724-045-6

Printed in United States of America

2nd printing; 2010

The Atlas Society

1001 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 830

Washington, DC, 20036

On the Web: www.atlassociety.org

Cover design by Douglas Hesselstine

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Reason and Value: Aristotle versus Rand

In her philosophical novel *Atlas Shrugged*, Ayn Rand has one of her heroes, Ragnar Danneskjöld, refer to Aristotle as “our teacher’s first teacher” (because Danneskjöld and his comrades were students of the Aristotelian philosopher Hugh Akston).¹ For those, like me, who first became interested in philosophy through the writings of Ayn Rand, Aristotle is indeed “our teacher’s first teacher.” To many of Rand’s admirers he is, I think, no more than that: at best a kind of John the Baptist, preparing the way for the true philosophical messiah.

For me it has been otherwise. Reading Rand in high school led to a philosophy major in college, and eventually to the Master Knower himself (to paraphrase Dante’s description of Aristotle²); and in the end it was Aristotle, not Rand, who claimed my philosophical allegiance. But I have not forgotten that it was Rand’s works which first opened up to me the world of philosophy, and I welcome this opportunity to reexamine some of her ideas from the perspective I have since reached.

Rand’s Objectivist philosophy proclaims itself a version of Aristotelianism. It is also a philosophy that places a premium on rationality. So my question here is: How far does the Objectivist account of rationality succeed in capturing the crucial insights of the Aristotelian approach? My answer, to give the game away, is that Rand unfortunately adopts a Platonic rather than an Aristotelian conception of theoretical rationality; that this in turn leads her to adopt a Humean rather than an Aristotelian conception of practical rationality; and that this leads her to adopt a Hobbesian rather than an Aristotelian conception of the relation between self-interest and morality—all of which tends to undermine her basically Aristotelian inclinations and sentiments. Hence, I would maintain, Rand’s admirers may still have something important to learn from their teacher’s first teacher.³

I. Rationality as Purely Procedural: David Hume

Perhaps the best way to understand what is most significant in the Aristotelian approach to rationality is to see it as a Golden Mean between, and a response to the difficulties raised by, two rather different conceptions of rationality, which I shall call the Humean or Sophist conception and the Platonic conception.⁴

On the Humean conception (still widely influential today), rationality is purely procedural. Theoretical rationality enables us to derive true conclusions reliably, given true premises, but it is of no use in identifying true premises; practical rationality enables us reliably to select appropriate means, given appropriate ends, but it is of no use in choosing appropriate ends.

Hume is not simply making the usual empiricist point that abstract reason alone cannot, in isolation from all further data, generate the premises of knowledge. His point is rather the stronger one that upon being supplied with reliable data, reason as such can give us no more reason to accept those data than to reject them. Hence it is by feeling or inclination, not reason, that we decide upon our basic premises:

When I am convinc'd of any principle, 'tis only an idea, which strikes more strongly upon me. When I give the preference to one set of arguments above another, I do nothing but decide from my feeling concerning the superiority of their influence.⁵

This analysis applies, above all, to our belief in cause and effect, the crucial assumption upon which depends nearly everything else we believe. This belief cannot be rationally derived from any of our other beliefs or experiences but is simply basic; and since the belief in causality is a basic premise or principle, reason can have nothing to say either for it or against it. The decision must rest with feeling alone.

If we reason *a priori* any thing may appear able to produce any thing. The falling of a pebble may, for aught we know, extinguish the sun; or the wish of a man control the planets in their orbits.⁶

Reason can never satisfy us that the existence of any one object does ever imply that of another; so that when we pass from the impression of one to the idea or belief of another, we are not determin'd by reason, but by custom or a principle of association. . . . Objects have no discoverable connexion together; nor is it from any other principle but custom operating upon the imagination, that we draw any inference from the appearance of one to the existence of another.⁷

Now just as theoretical rationality cannot guide us in choosing our basic premises, so practical rationality cannot guide us in choosing our basic values. Given a certain goal or end, reason can enable us to evaluate the most efficient means of attaining it. But when it comes to evaluating the end itself, reason is silent, and the decision rests once more with feeling:

Nothing is more usual in philosophy, and even in common life, than to talk of the combat of passion and reason . . . [But] reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will . . . Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them. . . . 'Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the world to the scratching of my finger.⁸

Yet Hume, as I read him, is not in the end a skeptic, either in theoretical or in practical matters. He believes we can indeed learn the truth. He merely argues that since reason cannot provide us with true premises, and in fact is more likely to lead us astray, our salvation lies with our inborn natural inclinations, which make us tire eventually of skeptical arguments, however sound, and so lead us to embrace common sense in defiance of reason.

'Tis impossible upon any system to defend either our understanding or our senses; and we but expose them farther when we endeavour to justify them in that manner. As the sceptical doubt arises naturally from a profound and intense reflection on those subjects, it always encreases, the farther we carry our reflections . . . Carelessness and inattention alone can afford us any remedy. For this reason I rely entirely upon them . . .⁹

When we trace the human understanding to its first principles, we find it to lead us into such sentiments, as seem to turn into ridicule all our past pains and industry, and to discourage us from future enquiries. . . . the understanding, when it acts alone, and according to its most general principles, entirely subverts itself, and leaves not the lowest degree of evidence in any proposition, either in philosophy or common life. . . . The *intense* view of these manifold contradictions and imperfections in human reason has so wrought upon me, and heated my brain, that I am ready to reject all belief and reasoning, and can look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another. . . . Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relaxing this bent of mind, or by some avocation, and lively impression of my senses, which obliterate all these chimeras. . . . If we believe, that fire warms, or water refreshes, 'tis only because it costs us too much pains to think otherwise.¹⁰

When Hume proclaims that we hold our beliefs in causation and an external world on the basis of passion, not of reason (and often in the face of reason), he is not debunking those beliefs but explaining them. Feeling, not reason, is the source that provides us with genuinely reliable principles both theoretical and practical:

The Author [Hume] is charged with . . . denying this Principle, *That whatever begins to exist must have a Cause of Existence*. To give you a Notion of the Extravagance of this Charge, I must enter into a little Detail. It is common for Philosophers to distinguish the Kinds of Evidence into *intuitive, demonstrative, sensible, and moral*; by which they intend *only* to mark a Difference betwixt them, not to denote a Superiority of one above another. *Moral Certainty* may reach as *high* a Degree of Assurance as *Mathematical*; and our Senses are surely to be comprised amongst the clearest and most convincing of all Evidences. [The author denies that belief in causality] was founded on *demonstrative or intuitive Certainty*; but asserts, that it is supported by *moral Evidence* . . . which indeed *a Man must have lost all common Sense to doubt of* . . . I come now to the last Charge . . . *viz.* the Author's destroying all the Foundations of Morality. He hath indeed denied . . . [that] the Propositions of Morality were of the same Nature with the Truths of Mathematicks and the abstract Sciences, the Objects *merely* of Reason, not the *Feelings* of our internal *Tastes* and *Sentiments*.¹¹

To deny that reason can serve as the foundation either of science or of morality is not to leave science and morality ungrounded but to ground them instead on natural inclination. And natural inclination is a trustworthy guide because there is a reliable correlation between the way the world is and what we have a natural tendency to believe:

. . . in all reasonings from experience, there is a step taken by the mind, which is not supported by any argument or process of the understanding . . . [yet on] these reasonings . . . almost all knowledge depends. . . . If the mind be not engaged by argument to make this step, it must be induced by some other principle of equal weight and authority . . . This principle is CUSTOM or HABIT. . . . Without the influence of custom, we should be entirely ignorant of every matter of fact, beyond what is immediately present to the memory and senses. . . . There would be an end at once of all action Here, then, is a kind of pre-established harmony between the course of nature and the succession of our ideas Custom is that principle, by which this correspondence has been effected; so necessary to the

subsistence of our species, and the regulation of our conduct, in every circumstance and occurrence of human life. Had not the presence of an object instantly excited the idea of those objects, commonly conjoined with it, all our knowledge must have been limited to the narrow sphere of our memory and senses; and we should never have been able to adjust means to ends, or employ our natural powers Those, who delight in the discovery and contemplation of *final causes*, have here ample subject to employ their wonder and admiration. [The tendency to believe in causality] is so essential to the subsistence of all human creatures, it is not probable, that it could be trusted to . . . reason, which is . . . extremely liable to error and mistake. It is more conformable to the ordinary wisdom of nature to secure so necessary an act of the mind, by some instinct or mechanical tendency, which may be infallible [and] independent of all the laboured deductions of the understanding.¹²

Note that our natural inclinations are what prevent our knowledge from being confined to immediate sensations. Thus, the benefit our inclinations provide is genuinely cognitive, saving us from being “entirely ignorant.” Thus Hume, as I read him, is no skeptic. But he does insist, not merely that reason is incapable of generating its own premises, but further that reason cannot even give us a reason to accept reliable premises when it finds them. The evaluation of basic premises must rest on passion alone.

We may find these conclusions uncongenial. But Hume did not adopt them frivolously; indeed, they are difficult to avoid. We know what reason is: it is the thing that enables us to make logically valid inferences, deriving conclusions from given premises. Given the sort of thing reason is, how *could* it have anything to say about the premises themselves? How *could* reason be more than purely procedural?

II. Rationality as Substantive but Mystical: Plato

This brings us to the Platonic conception of rationality, which we might view as a kind of response in advance to Hume. Obviously, Plato had not read Hume. But he had read works of Sophists like Gorgias and Antiphon, who argued for conclusions rather like Hume’s with regard to theoretical rationality and practical rationality respectively. Plato insists that rationality is not procedural only but also substantive: theoretical rationality can evaluate not only inferences from basic premises but the basic premises themselves; and practical rationality can evaluate not only means to ultimate ends but the ultimate ends themselves. Thus Plato avoids conceding the *rational arbitrariness* (that is, arbitrariness as far as reason is concerned) of basic premises and ultimate ends, a concession required by the Humean account.

Plato appears to have been led, in his Middle Dialogues, to develop his

substantive account of rationality through reflection on the Socratic Method exemplified in his Early Dialogues.¹³ The Socratic Method—also called “dialectic”—proceeds by question and answer: the teacher elicits from his student some judgments or opinions on the topic at hand, and then, by strategic questioning, traces the hidden implications of these judgments or shows their inconsistency with the student’s other beliefs. By forcing the student to reflect on his beliefs, draw out their consequences, and resolve inconsistencies, the teacher moves him to a new and more coherent set of beliefs. The ultimate aim of this process—though in the Early Dialogues it is seldom if ever achieved—is to lead the student upward from his initial confused mass of particular judgments to a general insight into the essence or fundamental nature of the topic being explored—virtue, friendship, or whatever. Once this essence has been grasped, the student can then return to the level of particular judgments, and, armed with this general insight, discriminate between true and false beliefs on the subject, explain why the true beliefs are true, resolve all the problem cases, and eliminate any remaining incoherence or uncertainty.

Plato’s remarks on method in the Middle Dialogues make explicit what was already implicit in the Early Dialogues: one can be one’s own questioner, simultaneously student and teacher, and so employ the Socratic Method on one’s own, eliciting from oneself preliminary judgments on some topic, and then tracing the logical implications of those initial judgments and resolving inconsistencies among them: “But anyway, then, I set out in just this way, and in each case supposing the account I judge the strongest, I posit as true those things that seem to me to harmonise with it . . . and those that do not, I posit as not true.”¹⁴

In the Early Dialogues, Plato’s attention appears to have been focused primarily on the ethical questions being investigated rather than on the method of investigation. In the Middle Dialogues, however, Plato begins to reflect on the Socratic Method itself and to wonder how it could be expected to yield reliable knowledge. After all, the beliefs from which the method starts are not absolutely certain; on the contrary, more often than not they are a confused mess of unreflective prejudices, many of which will be discarded in the course of the dialectic. Why should we give credence to conclusions reached on the basis of such flimsy starting points? True, the set of beliefs we end up with will be more consistent internally than the one we started with. It may even hang together in an intellectually satisfying network of mutually supporting propositions. But that is no guarantee of its truth. Indeed, for all we know, the search for coherence may have led us even farther into error. How can we be sure that we have not achieved coherence by throwing out true beliefs and keeping false ones?

For if the positer went astray at the beginning, and then forced the other things into agreement with this and necessitated them to harmonise with himself, it would not be at all strange—just as in diagrams sometimes, though a slight and inconspicuous falsity arises

at the start, still the vast train of consequences all cohere with each other. Truly, it is about the starting-point of any matter that every man must focus his primary discussion and primary investigation, as to whether or not it has been laid down correctly (and once that has been sufficiently examined, whether the rest appear to follow therefrom).¹⁵

Our initial, unreflective beliefs—the starting points of dialectic—are too haphazard and full of error to count as genuine knowledge. Yet, when we have finished our process of tracing implications and resolving conflicts, whatever conclusions we reach at the end of the day would appear to rest, ultimately, on those very same flimsy and treacherous foundations. And surely a conclusion is only as reliable as the premises that generate it. So how can the dialectical method yield genuine knowledge, given that its starting points fall so far short of knowledge?

Here, Plato has come face to face with Hume's problem: if reason simply derives conclusions from given premises but cannot evaluate the premises themselves, then reason can provide no grounds for accepting its conclusions. Yet he wants to resist Hume's conclusion—that reason is cognitively impotent. So what Plato does, in effect, is to ask himself: what must reason be like if it is *not* to be cognitively impotent? And his answer is: that to be effective reason must enable us to recognize in the conclusion some mark of trustworthiness that does not derive solely from initial premises. It is this mysterious capacity of reason that is embodied in the dialectical method and makes it reliable:

[Dialectical reason] treats suppositions not as first principles but as suppositions, like stepping stones and first steps, passing onward to reach what is no supposition: the first principle of everything. Having grasped this, it reverses direction and . . . descends to a conclusion. . . .

For what mechanism, beginning with what is not known, and constructing the conclusion and what comes in between on the basis of what is not known, could transform such an agreement into knowledge? None! . . . Dialectic is the only inquiry that follows this path, doing away with suppositions and proceeding to the first principle itself.¹⁶

We are not, then, to see the results of dialectical inquiry as resting on our starting beliefs the way conclusions rest on premises. Rather, starting beliefs are less like the foundations of a building, which must bear all the weight of the upper stories, than like a springboard or a ladder that may be left behind once the goal is reached. The relation is not so much inferential as causal; running through the process of dialectic somehow puts our mind into the right state, so that, at the end, we can grasp

the truth with an intuitive certainty that transcends our confidence in the premises we started with.

But with difficulty, after working carefully through each of these things—names and accounts and sights and perceptions—in relation to one another, examining them in friendly cross-examinations, and asking and making response without ill will, wisdom and understanding about each thing will flash out upon the scene, straining the limits of human capacity.¹⁷

What we ultimately grasp—the first principle that is no mere supposition—is what Plato calls the Form of the Good (or, sometimes, the Form of the Beautiful).¹⁸ That is the basic principle that explains all of existence, and grasping it is more like experiencing a divine epiphany than like completing a syllogism. Indeed, this ultimate revelation does not seem to be something that can be expressed in words. In a famous simile, Plato compares the philosopher's dialectical ascent from the obscurity of ordinary beliefs to the clarity of the Good to the prisoner's escaping from a dark cave to glimpse the sun for the first time:

So then, the sun is not vision, indeed, but is the cause of vision. . . . [The Form of the Good] in the intelligible realm stands in the same relation to intellect and intelligible things as that in which, in the visible realm, this [the sun] stands to vision and visible things. . . . You know that the eyes, when one turns them toward those things whose colours are no longer in the light of day, but rather in the gloom of night, grow dim and appear nearly blind, as if clear vision were no longer present in them. . . . But whenever one turns them toward things illuminated by the sun, I presume, they see clearly, and vision appears within those very eyes. . . . In this way, then, understand the soul also. . . . So what gives the objects of knowledge their truth, and gives the knower his ability to know, is the Idea of the Good. . . . And the objects of knowledge derive from the Good not only their being known, but even their being at all.¹⁹

Thus the Form of the Good is, epistemologically, the first principle of theoretical reason, because it is, metaphysically, the first principle of being.

Likewise, the Form of the Good is, epistemologically, the first principle of practical reason, because it is, metaphysically, the first principle of value. Only by grasping this first principle does one acquire true virtue—including the ability to make correct decisions about right and wrong:

Among what is knowable, the Idea of the Good is the last and most

difficult to see; but once it has been seen, it cannot but be inferred to be the cause of all that is correct and beautiful in anything. . . . And one must view this if one is going to act wisely in either the private or the public sphere.²⁰

For he who, thus far, has been educated in matters of love, beholding beautiful things in succession and correctly, will then suddenly, passing to the end of the matters of love, see a marvelous something, beautiful in its nature: this is that . . . for the sake of which in fact were all his previous labours too—existing eternally, in the first place, and neither coming to be nor perishing. . . . Nor yet will the Beautiful appear to him like any face, nor like hands, nor anything else in which the body shares, nor like anything spoken, nor like any knowledge, nor like what is somewhere in something else, as in an animal, or in earth, or in heaven, or in anything else; but rather existing Itself by Itself with Itself, single in Form, forever, while all other things are beautiful by sharing in that. . . . For this indeed is the correct way to proceed in matters of love, or to be led by another: beginning from beautiful things here, to pass ever upward for the sake of *that*, as though using steps, from one to two, and from two to all beautiful bodies, and from beautiful bodies to beautiful practices, and from practices to beautiful studies, and from studies one ends at that study which is nothing other than the study of that Beautiful, and one ends by knowing, in itself, what is Beautiful. . . . There alone it will come about for him, in seeing the Beautiful with that by which one sees it, to generate, not images of virtue, since he is not in contact with an image, but true virtue, since he is in contact with the truth.²¹

Just as reflection on our initial beliefs will lead us ultimately into a vision of the truth, so reflection on our initial desires—for physical beauty, say—will lead us up to a recognition of true value. Hence, the contingency of our everyday desires, like that of our everyday beliefs, is no threat to the necessity of the conclusion. And our reason, by enabling us to grasp the Form of the Good, will then allow us to evaluate our basic desires, as well as our basic beliefs. Thus, rationality, in both its theoretical and its practical employment, turns out to be substantive rather than merely procedural.

All this sounds rather fanciful, to say the least. But the core of Plato's theory—the account of reason as ascending dialectically from our starting beliefs to an insight that does not depend on those beliefs—enables him to solve some genuine epistemological puzzles. Consider, for example, the following challenge to the Socratic Method, or indeed to any kind of inquiry:

For how do you propose to search for something you do not know? Or even if you should happen upon it, how will you know that this is the thing that you did not know? . . . For one cannot search for what one knows anyway—for one knows it, and for such a thing at least there is no need to search; nor for what one does not know—for one does not know what to search for either!²²

This challenge, often referred to as Meno's Paradox, contains two distinct paradoxes, which we may call the Search Paradox and the Recognition Paradox. The Search Paradox says that only by grasping the essence of X are we able to discriminate between Xs and non-Xs. So if we have not grasped X's essence, and so cannot recognize Xs in our experience, then we cannot have the slightest idea how to go about inquiring into X; indeed it becomes unclear whether anything we then do can even *count* as inquiring into X. The Recognition Paradox, on the other hand, says that even if we were to stumble across a correct account of the essence of X, we would not recognize it, and thus would not be able to distinguish it from the multitude of erroneous accounts of the essence of X—because in order to recognize that this is the essence of X one must first know the essence of X.

These two paradoxes strike at the heart of the Socratic Method. The Socratic inquirer starts out without a grasp of the essence of, say, virtue; this is what he is trying to find. What he starts with instead is a vast swarm of beliefs about virtue, and he works his way up toward the essence by working through these beliefs dialectically. But—the Search Paradox demands—without a grasp of the essence of virtue, how can he be justified in placing any reliance on these beliefs about virtue? How can he even be confident that it is virtue these beliefs are about? Moreover, once the Socratic inquirer reaches a true definition of virtue, how—the Recognition Paradox demands—will he be able to recognize it as true, since he was ignorant at the outset? The Socratic Method apparently gives us no way of finding the truth, and no way of identifying it even if we do find it.

So much the worse, one might conclude, for the Socratic Method. Yet the method does sometimes work. Plato is much impressed by the fact that a person initially ignorant in geometry can be led to formulate a correct proof of a geometric theorem simply by being asked the right questions.²³

Plato explains this fact and resolves the two paradoxes by the Theory of Recollection. When we discover the truth, it will have a glow of familiarity to it; coming upon the right answer, at least if we reach it in the right way, will trigger in us a kind of latent knowledge, and, Plato says, we will experience a feeling of recognition. That is the solution to the Recognition Paradox. Moreover, this innate insight into the truth can be a matter of degree. Some inkling of it is present even at the level of our starting beliefs. Plato tells us, for example, that some faint recollection of the Form of Equal is implicit even in the mere recognition that two things are equal in

some respects and unequal in others.²⁴ This faint light is presumably what guarantees that a fair number of our starting beliefs are right, and that as we find inconsistencies we are led, if we reflect carefully, to resolve them in the direction of truth rather than error. That is the answer to the Search Paradox.

Now, Plato takes the notion of “recollection” seriously and concludes that dialectic can lead us to this flash of recognition because between successive earthly incarnations our disembodied souls have direct contact with the Forms.

Now given that the soul is immortal, and has been born many times, and has seen all things both here and in Hades, there is nothing amazing in its being able to recollect what it in any case knew before, both concerning virtue and concerning other things. For given that everything in nature is interrelated, and the soul has learned all things, nothing prevents one who has recollected one thing only . . . from discovering all the other things for himself, if he is manly and does not grow weary of searching. For searching and learning are entirely a matter of recollection.²⁵

But what is central and crucial in Plato’s theory is not the metaphysical machinery of transcendent Forms and transmigrating souls. Dispense with all that, and the core *epistemological* idea remains: if there is something luminous about the truth, and reason has an innate tendency to recognize truth when it finds it, then it no longer matters that inquiry proceeds from unreliable starting points.

The notion that reasoning from initial premises might have a causal rather than a purely inferential role in grasping the conclusion may seem a bit less mysterious if we turn from talk of the Form of the Good to a more mundane example. Consider figure 1. In this figure one can see the word “Plato” (if one works at it).



Figure 1.

But to an illiterate person, figure 1 would be nothing but a collection of lines and boxes. It is not just that the illiterate person would not be able to *read* the word; he would not *see* the word. Thus, your background knowledge of letters and words enables you to perceive a single unified entity—the name “Plato”—that the illiterate viewer literally does not perceive. Yet your background knowledge does not serve as a premise from which your perception of the word is inferred as a conclusion. No

inference occurs (at least not consciously); your background knowledge of written language instead *enables* you, non-inferentially, to perceive the word.

We may think of Plato's conception of dialectical reasoning by analogy with this example; working through the dialectical process serves as background context that *enables* you, non-inferentially, to perceive the truth of the conclusion once you reach it. And figure 1 indeed shows that the sort of thing Plato is talking about does happen. Yet Plato must claim, much more strongly, that all rational knowledge follows this model: that human reason, in evaluating claims of ultimate truth or ultimate value, can render a reliable judgment only by a kind of intellectual intuition analogous to perception. Platonic rationality, unlike its Humean rival, is substantive rather than procedural; but in its substantive employment Platonic rationality does not do much that looks like *reasoning*. To be sure, reasoning is needed in order to crank the engine of substantive rationality and prepare it for operation. But in the moment of operation, reason qua substantive reason does not infer, does not deduce, does not *reason*; it merely *sees*.

Education isn't the sort of thing some self-appointed experts say it is: now they claim to be putting knowledge into a soul that lacks it, like putting sight into eyes that are blind. . . . But this power is present in each soul; and the organ with which each person learns is like the eye which cannot be turned from darkness to the light without turning the whole body. . . . This very art of leading-around is a matter of effecting this turning in whatever manner is easiest and least subject to resistance—not by implanting sight into the soul, but by redirecting a soul that possesses sight but is improperly oriented and does not look in the direction it should.²⁶

The Platonic conception of rationality, then, avoids the drawbacks of Hume's purely procedural account—yet only at the cost of embracing a mystical intuitionism. Theoretical rationality tracks truth in virtue of an ineffable insight into the nature of the real, just as practical rationality tracks value in virtue of an ineffable insight into the nature of the good.

These conclusions too we may find uncongenial. But Plato did not adopt them frivolously, any more than Hume did his. In fact, they too are difficult to avoid. If theoretical rationality is to be substantive rather than merely procedural—evaluating basic premises, not just inferences from them—how can it do this by reasoning, that is, by simply making more inferences? Must not reason instead discriminate true premises from false by a direct insight not reached on the basis of inference? Likewise, if practical rationality is to be substantive rather than merely procedural—evaluating ultimate ends, not just means to them—must it not do this through a direct, unmediated insight into what is and is not valuable? How could reason be substantive, except by way of a mystical, inexplicable intuition?

III. Substantive Rationality Without Mysticism: Aristotle

Hume and Plato, then, are the Scylla and Charybdis between which Aristotle may be seen as attempting to sail. In Objectivist terminology, which I hope I am using correctly, one might see Hume, Plato, and Aristotle as proponents of (respectively) a subjective, an intrinsic, and an objective conception of rationality.²⁷

Yet the Aristotelian conception of rationality is often assumed to be no genuine alternative to the Platonic conception but merely a variant of it. Rand herself seems to have thought this, and certainly her closest associate, Leonard Peikoff, has said as much. Indeed, this is one of the respects in which Objectivists typically take Rand to have improved on Aristotle. Peikoff describes Aristotle's view as follows:

[First principles are] accessible to that human cognitive faculty which (granted a knowledge of the universal concepts involved and an appropriate inductive stimulus) grasps the unmediated connections in the world by an act of direct, unmediated (i.e., noninferential) and “unfailingly true” intellectual insight . . . the process is inductive in the sense that it proceeds to the general proposition from a number of singular propositions which must be known to be true before the general truth can be conceived and, therefore, before the general truth can be known; but it is not an inductive *inference* or *argument*, since the general proposition, once conceived, is self-evident and does not require to be inferred from premises.²⁸

Peikoff's portrait of Aristotle should be recognizable as roughly equivalent, minor details aside, to my portrait of Plato. I wish to argue, however, that Aristotle in fact offers an attractive and defensible “third way” that avoids both the proceduralism of Hume and the intuitionism of Plato.

The core of Aristotle's conception of rationality lies in his theory of first principles, which in turn is part of his theory of *epistêmê*. For Aristotle, an *epistêmê* is an organized body of knowledge arranged in a hierarchical and explanatory structure, with lower-level items of knowledge being demonstrated by higher-level ones, and these in turn by higher-level ones, and so on until at the apex we reach the first principles, which are themselves indemonstrable. These first principles are not our cognitive starting points, however; instead, we start from “appearances” (*phainomena*) that are not themselves (at least initially) objects of *epistêmê*, and from them we work up dialectically to a grasp of the first principles. The appearances from which we are to start include not only the empirical data of sense-perception²⁹ but also “reputable beliefs” or *endoxa*.³⁰

Now the Greek word *epistêmê* has a broad range of meanings, from “knowl-

edge” at the weakest to “science” or “understanding” at the strongest. Interpreters of Aristotle have accordingly disagreed about whether Aristotle is offering us a theory of knowledge in general, or a theory of scientific understanding specifically. It remains to be seen, then, whether Aristotle’s strict preconditions for *epistêmê* are preconditions for knowing anything whatsoever, or whether the conditions for mere knowledge are more lax, and these are merely preconditions for a more specialized form of knowledge.

The distinction may be made clearer with an example. Suppose I observe a lunar eclipse, but I have no idea that such eclipses are caused by the earth’s shadow falling on the moon. Aristotle would say that I lack *epistêmê* of the eclipse (since, on his account, I fail to grasp the eclipse’s essence).³¹ On the *epistêmê*-as-understanding interpretation, Aristotle grants that I *know* an eclipse has occurred, but denies that I genuinely *understand* what I know. But on the *epistêmê*-as-knowledge interpretation, Aristotle denies that I can legitimately claim even to have *knowledge* of the eclipse.

At *Posterior Analytics* I.3, Aristotle introduces the problem regarding the cognitive status of these first principles by considering the following two paradoxes:

1. To have *epistêmê* of p, one must demonstrate p.
2. One can demonstrate p only if one has *epistêmê* of the premises.
3. *Epistêmê* involves either circular demonstration or an infinite regress of demonstration. (1, 2)
4. Circular demonstration is impossible.
5. An infinite regress of demonstration is impossible.
6. *Epistêmê* is impossible. (3, 4, 5)

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4. An infinite regress of demonstration is impossible.
5. *Epistêmê* is possible.
6. Circular demonstration is possible. (3, 4, 5)

Aristotle’s solution runs as follows:

1. *Epistêmê* is possible.
2. Circular demonstration is impossible.
3. An infinite regress of demonstration is impossible.
4. *Epistêmê* involves neither circular demonstration nor an infinite regress of demonstration. (1, 2, 3)
5. One can demonstrate p only if one has *epistêmê* of the premises.
6. To have *epistêmê* of the premises, one need not demonstrate the premises. (4, 5)

In short, Aristotle concludes that there are two sorts of *epistêmê*: nondemonstrative *epistêmê* (also called *nous*), which is of first principles, and demonstrative *epistêmê*, which is of propositions derived by way of demonstration from first principles.

Thus far, Aristotle looks like a Cartesian-style foundationalist. Everything we know either is or is derived from a foundational belief. We know nonfoundational propositions by deriving them from foundational ones; and we know foundational ones directly by some sort of intuition, without deriving them from anything else. First principles are the starting points of knowledge.

Yet this interpretation cannot be right; for Aristotle denies that we should start with the first principles. First principles are most familiar in themselves, he holds, but we should start from what is most familiar to us, and work from there up to the things most familiar in themselves.

Aristotle's epistemology, then, begins to look like a variant of Plato's after all: we work our way up dialectically from our initial beliefs, until we grasp the first principles of demonstration, and only then do we have knowledge.

Aristotle's view is certainly deeply indebted to Plato, as the following passages show:

Now if scientific understanding is such as we have posited, it is also necessary for demonstrative science to be grounded on premises that are a) true, and b) primary, and c) immediate, and d) better known than, and e) prior to, and f) causative of the conclusion. . . . It is when we know the cause that we have scientific understanding. . . . But the prior and better known is twofold. For that which is prior by nature and that which is prior in relation to us are not the same, nor are what is better known and what is better known to us. I call prior and better known in relation to us, what is closer to sense-perception; and prior and better known absolutely, what is further away. Now what is most universal is furthest away, while particulars are nearest. . . . The first principle of a demonstration is also an immediate premise; and the immediate is that to which nothing else is prior.³²

Deduction, then, is an argument in which, when certain things have been posited, something other than the assumptions follows from the assumptions of necessity. So the deduction is a demonstration whenever it is grounded on premises that are true and primary . . . but the deduction is dialectical that deduces from reputable beliefs. Now true and primary premises are ones which are reliable not on account of something else but on account of themselves. For in the case of the first principles of the sciences, there is no need to make

any further inquiry as to why it is so; rather, each of the first principles is reliable in its own right, by itself. Reputable beliefs, on the other hand, are those which seem true to everybody, or to the majority, or to the wise (and of the latter, either all or the majority or the most distinguished and reputable). . . . [Inquiry into dialectic] is useful . . . with regard to the primary first principles of each science. For it is impossible to say anything about them on the basis of the first principles belonging to the science under consideration, since the first principles are primary in relation to everything else. But it is necessary to consider them through the reputable beliefs on each topic. And this is peculiar, or especially appropriate, to dialectic; for, being examinative, it provides a route to the first principles of all disciplines.³³

Here we see, apparently, the main elements of the Platonic account. Our starting points are fallible common beliefs; but dialectical reasoning gives us a way of ascending from them to a grasp of self-evident first principles, whence it is then possible to descend, producing genuine demonstrations and explanations of the phenomena. (Note that demonstration is an explanatory notion for Aristotle, not just a matter of deductive validity.)

But the character of first principles seems somewhat more down-to-earth in Aristotle than in Plato. The dialectical ascent does not end in a glimpse of an ineffable Form resplendent in its solitary glory; it ends, instead, in either postulates³⁴ or axioms :

Now I call a postulate an immediate first principle of inference that cannot be demonstrated, but which it is not necessary to grasp in order to learn anything; but that which it is necessary to grasp in order to learn anything whatever, I call an axiom.³⁵

An axiom is a truth that is somehow implicit in or presupposed by all human knowledge. Although strictly speaking one cannot demonstrate an axiom, one can establish its status as a first principle through “negative demonstration,” showing that one cannot coherently say or think anything, including a denial of the axiom, without thereby committing oneself to the axiom’s truth. Aristotle’s favorite example is the Law of Non-Contradiction, and he devotes the fourth book of his *Metaphysics* to a negative demonstration of it. A postulate, on the other hand, is a first principle that cannot be demonstrated at all, even negatively, and that is reached instead on the basis of ordinary dialectic. As *Posterior Analytics* II.5-8 shows, postulates are ordinarily statements of the essence or identity of a thing; such essences are the fundamental explainers, in Aristotle’s view.³⁶

Leaving axioms aside as a special case, let us consider the dialectical ascent to

postulates. What, for Aristotle, is the epistemic status of the appearances from which this ascent starts (such appearances including both the data of sense-perception and the *endoxa* or reputable beliefs)? There are two possibilities:

1. The appearances are not genuinely known but only believed. By starting from them, however, we can reach a point where we know the postulates. At that point, we will be able to turn back and demonstrate the beliefs from which we started, turning them from mere beliefs into knowledge.
2. The appearances are genuinely known but not fully understood. By starting from them, however, we can reach a point where we understand the postulates. At that point, we will be able to turn back and demonstrate the beliefs from which we started, turning them from mere knowledge into understanding.

On the first view, the appearances are mere stepping stones, contributing causally but not justificatorily to an eventual intuitive grasp of first principles. This view would make Aristotle a foundationalist with a Platonic view about the doxastic preconditions of intuitive knowledge.³⁷

On the second view, Aristotle is not concerned with knowledge at all, but rather with scientific understanding. *Epistêmatai* are hierarchically arranged explanatory structures. Our beliefs already count as knowledge, but in order to understand their objects we need to get them into these structures, and at the foundation of the structure will be beliefs whose objects are not (need not be? cannot be?) explained in terms of anything else. Thus, about knowledge and justification Aristotle might well be a coherentist (holding that beliefs are justified to the extent that they cohere with each other). But about explanation, he might be a foundationalist (holding that beliefs are explanatory to the extent that they are either explanatorily basic or else deduced from beliefs that are explanatorily basic). The point is that a belief might be explanatorily basic without being justificatorily basic, or vice versa.

I believe Aristotle holds the second view (coherentism for knowledge and justification, foundationalism for explanation)—in which case his position is not nearly as close to Plato's as it first looked. Consider the following passage:

Now let it not escape our notice that arguments from first principles and those toward first principles are different. For Plato indeed did well to raise difficulties about this, and to inquire whether the path leads from the first principles or toward the first principles (just as in the stadium it may lead from the starting line to the finish, or back again). For while one should start from the things that are well-known [*gnôrimôn*], yet these are twofold: for some are so to us, and others simply. Like as not, then, for us at least the place to start is with things that are well-known to us. . . . For the "that" is the starting-point [*viz.*, for us]; and if this is sufficiently apparent, there will be no need in addition for the "because."³⁸

Aristotle's reference to the starting-points of dialectic as *gnôrima* strongly suggests that these appearances are objects of *gnôsis*. Now *gnôsis* may not be *epistêmê*, but on any reading it is clearly a form of knowledge. Hence the dialectical starting-points are genuinely known, and *epistêmê* as used here must mean scientific understanding not mere knowledge. Otherwise, Aristotle could not be contrasting *epistêmê* with *gnôsis*; yet he does contrast them. Both appearances and first principles are here described as objects of *gnôsis*, but we know that appearances are most emphatically not (at least until we have come back down) objects of *epistêmê*. The simplest explanation, then, is that Aristotle is using *gnôsis* as the generic term for knowledge of any sort, and restricting *epistêmê* to a particular subcategory of knowledge (namely, knowledge of the "because" rather than knowledge merely of the "that").³⁹

There is still more evidence for this interpretation:

Further, every science seems to be teachable, and the scientifically knowable is learnable. But all teaching is from what is already known [*proginôskomenôn*], just as we say in the *Analytics* too. For one sort is by induction, another by deduction. Induction, then, is *of* the origin and *of* the universal, while deduction is *from* the universals. There are, then, first principles *from* which the deduction is, *of* which there is no deduction. So it's induction [that leads us to the first principles].⁴⁰

The word *proginôskomenôn*, like its cousin *gnôrimôn*, is also derived from *gnôsis*. Thus, induction from appearances to first principles would seem to count as teaching or learning on the basis of prior knowledge no less than deduction from first principles does. First principles and the deductions from them are necessary, not to give us knowledge but to give us scientific understanding; and the initial inductive stage is a crucial justificatory stage in the process, not merely a causally necessary condition for some mysterious direct intuition into first principles. Like his teacher Plato, then, Aristotle has given us an epistemology designed to undergird and legitimize the Socratic Method; but unlike Plato, he has done so without recourse to any kind of mysticism.

Aristotle thus appears to be counseling two steps. First, pursue a coherentist strategy for discovering first principles, by provisionally accepting all the beliefs that initially seem true or plausible to us (including, but not limited to, our perceptual beliefs) as defeasibly justified, and then try to see which candidates for first principles best cohere with our total set of beliefs in wide reflective equilibrium.⁴¹ Second, once the first principles have been thus identified, pursue a foundationalist strategy for demonstrating and thus explaining the truth of our initial beliefs (or some of them) by deriving them from these first principles.

The things well-known to us are genuinely known but not fully understood. By starting from them, however, we can reach a point where we understand first

principles. At that point, we will be able to turn back and demonstrate the beliefs from which we started, turning them from mere knowledge into understanding. Aristotle's epistemology is primarily concerned not with knowledge but with explanation: *epistêmai* are hierarchically arranged explanatory structures; our beliefs already count as knowledge, but in order to understand their objects we need to get them into these structures, and at the foundation of the structure will be beliefs whose objects need not be explained in terms of anything else. (We are not enchained by our present beliefs, however. As the Socratic Method indicates, the process of getting our beliefs into such structures, and eliminating internal inconsistencies, will undoubtedly involve some revision—sometimes minimal, sometimes drastic—in those beliefs themselves.)

“Now just as in other cases, setting out the appearances and first going through the difficulties, one must in this way demonstrate preferably all the reputable beliefs about these affections, and if not all, then most, and the most authoritative.”⁴² Coherence among these appearances establishes truth-claims: “For if the difficulties are resolved and the reputable beliefs are left standing, the demonstration would be sufficient.”⁴³ Hence Aristotle's insistence that universal agreement is a sure sign of truth.⁴⁴

Moreover, Aristotle seems committed to the claim that argument from *endoxa* can indeed establish first principles. For he tells us that the path to what is best known in itself (the first principles) lies through what is best known to us (the appearances).⁴⁵ The point seems to be that we aim to organize our knowledge into an explanatory system or set of explanatory systems (the Aristotelian sciences); in working through our *endoxa* dialectically we discover what belongs at the foundation of our explanatory systems. Once again, then, Aristotle appears to be a coherentist about knowledge and justification, but a foundationalist about explanation.

Let me make these terms more precise:

Foundationalism: Beliefs are epistemically justified either by belonging to or by being derived (finitely, noncircularly) from a class of self-justifying beliefs.⁴⁶

Classical foundationalism: Foundationalism is true, and all foundational beliefs are indefeasible.

Neoclassical foundationalism: Foundationalism is true, and some foundational beliefs are defeasible.

Narrow foundationalism: Foundationalism is true, and only a privileged subset of our beliefs are foundational.

Broad foundationalism: Foundationalism is true, and all, or nearly all, our beliefs are foundational.

Coherentism: Beliefs are epistemically justified so long as, and to the extent that, they cohere with one another.

Negative coherentism: Coherentism is true, and beliefs cohere as long as they do not conflict with one another.

Positive coherentism: Coherentism is true, and beliefs cohere only if, in addition to not conflicting with one another, they positively support one another.

If we think of beliefs as citizens in an epistemological republic, then we may regard classical narrow foundationalism as an epistemic aristocracy: a citizen may exist and act only as permitted by the elite. Negative coherentism would then be an epistemic liberalism or libertarianism; a citizen may live freely so long as he does not harm other citizens. Positive coherentism would be an epistemic communitarianism or collectivism; a citizen's existence is justified only so long as he makes a positive contribution to the collective.

Note that negative coherentism and neoclassical broad foundationalism are essentially equivalent. And it is this view that I attribute to Aristotle. I also think it is the most defensible view in its own right. As David Brink (himself a defender of positive coherentism—though this is my term, not Brink's) points out:

. . . there are three strategies for incorporating the epistemological requirement that justifying beliefs be justified: (1) All justification is both linear and inferential; (2) although all justification is inferential, it is not all linear; and (3) although all justification is linear, it is not all inferential. Foundationalism represents (3), and the regress argument claims that foundationalism, and it alone, is an acceptable strategy. According to this argument, strategy (1) involves a vicious regress of justification, whereas strategy (2) involves a vicious circle of justification.⁴⁷

I agree with the argument here described and am unconvinced by Brink's arguments against the viciousness of the regress in (1) and the circle in (2); thus, I accept foundationalism. I accept a neoclassical version because I am not sure whether there are any indefeasible beliefs; and if there are, they appear to be so few that not much can be derived from them, and one can then avoid skepticism only by the shakiest of arguments—as the example of Descartes reminds us. And I accept a broad rather than a narrow version of neoclassical foundationalism, for a couple of reasons. First, I know of no version of narrow foundationalism, even of the neoclassical variety, that can plausibly claim to avoid skepticism; once one narrows one's justified beliefs to the privileged set, it is very difficult to get much beyond it. Second, since we inevitably start anyway with all the beliefs we have, the burden of proof lies with those who would have us start somewhere else—and I cannot see that this burden has ever been discharged. Indeed, the arguments given to convince us to restrict justification to the foundational beliefs generally rely themselves on the allegedly nonfoundational beliefs (as Descartes does in the First Meditation). Thus, it seems to me that there is an as yet undefeated presumption in favor of neoclassical broad foundationalism—which is to say, negative coherentism. To be sure, we will want,

wherever possible, to get our beliefs into classical-foundational, narrow-foundational, or positive-coherent structures; and such beliefs may well be *more* justified once this is done; that is, in conflicts between a belief existing in such a structure and another belief existing in no such structure, the former will be the one to keep. But if our beliefs were not already (defeasibly) justified at least to some extent, deriving them from other as-yet-unjustified beliefs would prove nothing.

One might reject negative coherentism about justification if one thought it required dispensing with metaphysical realism in favour of negative coherentism about truth—since if metaphysical realism is true, then mere negative coherence is no guarantee of truth.

But I see no inconsistency in being a realist about what there is, and a negative coherentist about what one is justified in believing about it. In any case, positive coherence and narrow foundationalism are no guarantee of truth either. That is, it is perfectly consistent with a belief's being justified in any of these ways, that it be false. If we are to follow Descartes in taking the possibility of a belief's being false as incompatible with its being justified, we will end up in skepticism pretty quickly.

There are in general three ways to try to meet the skeptical challenge by bridging the gap between knowledge and objective reality. The first is to maintain extremely high standards for what will count as knowledge, and extremely high standards for what will count as objective reality, and nevertheless heroically attempt to bridge the gulf. This was Descartes' approach, and it is generally agreed that it failed. In its wake came two responses: One response, that of Berkeley, Kant, and the recent Putnam (but ultimately going back to Protagoras), is to lower the standards for what will count as objective reality. The other response, employed by such philosophers as Aristotle and Reid (and to a lesser degree, and in his less skeptical moods, Hume), is to leave reality as it is but lower the standards for what will count as knowledge. And this seems most reasonable. When knowledge and reality go dancing, it had better be reality that leads.

However, an argument against this or any sort of coherentism has been offered by Alvin Plantinga:

Suppose at t I am in Oxford and know that I am; I am just outside the gates of Balliol College observing a small but noisy flock of gowned undergraduates on their way to the Examination Schools. Each of my beliefs is coherent with my noetic structure, which is itself coherent. Now imagine that I leave Oxford, taking the train to London. My experience then changes in the normal way; my visual, auditory and kinesthetic experience at t' , when I am on the train bound for London, is just what one would expect. Nevertheless I continue to hold exactly the beliefs that I held in Oxford at t ; I continue to believe that I am in Oxford and that those undergraduates are passing by. My beliefs at t' are coherent, for they are the

very beliefs I coherently held at *t*; no change has occurred. Nonetheless my noetic structure at *t*' is warrant defective; indeed, it is warrant defective *just because* no change occurred in it.⁴⁸

But is Plantinga correct in assuming that the person on the train really is holding exactly the same beliefs as in Oxford? This would be true if “visual, auditory and kinesthetic experience” were without cognitive content. But this is implausible. To have such experiences is for the world to seem a certain way to one, and thus to have such experiences is in essence to have beliefs, or something as close to beliefs as makes no difference.⁴⁹ Thus the person on the train is unjustified, because his intellectual beliefs are no longer consistent with his perceptual beliefs; his belief-set has grown incoherent.

A different reason offered for resisting this sort of coherentist picture is that it would allow our beliefs about morality to influence our beliefs about matters of fact. J. L. Mackie, among others, has argued that it is illegitimate to attempt to derive factual conclusions from normative premises:

. . . what it is rational to do depends on what the facts are, but we cannot take what we are inclined to think is rational to do as evidence about those facts. To use a conjunction of practical judgments to try to establish what the facts are would be to put the cart before the horse. We must rely on speculative reasoning first to determine what is the case, and then frame our practical and moral beliefs and attitudes in the light of these facts. There is a direction of supervenience: since what is morally and practically rational supervenes upon what is the case, what it is rational to believe with a view to practice, or to choose to do, must similarly supervene upon what it is rational to believe about what is the case.⁵⁰

But this claim is fantastic. What we see through telescopes when we point them at the heavens supervenes (i.e., asymmetrically depends) on what the heavens are really like, but it would be crazy to demand, along with Galileo's inquisitors, that our beliefs about what the heavens are really like should drive our beliefs about what can be seen through telescopes, and never the other way around. Even if the inquisitors' beliefs about the heavens were perfectly reasonable in their historical context, based on the best-supported scientific theorizing of the day (Aristotelian physics and its Scholastic development), they were not justified in rejecting Galileo's claims out of hand. The growth of knowledge is a matter not of rigid hierarchies but of networks of mutual adjustment; there is, at least initially, no privileged class of beliefs that holds absolute veto power over beliefs of another class.

But why should we believe that coherence tracks truth? Well, when I consider my beliefs from the inside, I do not need to be shown that coherence tracks truth.

The beliefs I am starting with are beliefs that I already take to be true (that is what it means to say that these are my beliefs); and so the beliefs dialectically established from these starting-points I will also take to be true. Of course, I may eventually come to ask how it is that coherence tracks truth. But here I am asking for an explanation of a recognized fact, not for a proof of something in question. (I am trying to move from mere *gnôsis* to *epistêmê*.) And I will no doubt have, on the basis of my current beliefs themselves, sufficient grounds for accepting such-and-such an explanation. For example, my beliefs tell me that I am a being supplied with reasonably accurate perceptual organs, reasonably reliable belief-formation mechanisms, and an environment of other knowers interacting in a truth-tracking manner à la Mill's *On Liberty*. But I do not need to know any of this initially in order for my beliefs to be justified.

No doubt the justification of one's beliefs will, however, be strengthened or weakened depending on one's ability or inability to come up with an explanation of why beliefs track truth. Indeed, the absence of such explanations where one expected to find them might well lead us, in good coherentist fashion, to revise our belief that our belief-forming mechanisms are reliable. Moreover, a belief-set that starts out justified may lose its justification if its possessor culpably fails to test it either for internal consistency or for consistency with new data.

Still, in the end, "ought" implies "can." Since we have no alternative to acting on the beliefs we have, we are justified in doing so, even if we cannot yet demonstrate these beliefs or explain why they are true; and so those beliefs are themselves justified, at least until a case can be made against them.

It might be objected that the Socratic dialectical approach of seeking coherence among our beliefs has been made obsolete by the scientific method of experiment. But the scientific method is dialectical too. No belief, normative or descriptive, can be tested in isolation; it can be tested only in conjunction with other beliefs. If this liquid apparently fails to boil at 100° C, I can reject my belief that water boils at 100° C, or my belief that this liquid is water, or my belief that the thermometer is working correctly, or my belief that I am awake and not hallucinating, and so forth. And if a belief does not conflict with the evidence of our senses, we may nonetheless have the same kind of reasons to reject it once we discover that it conflicts with a sufficient number of our non-perceptual beliefs. Hence, philosophical argument and scientific argument are identical in structure, and have an equal claim to objectivity. All we have, in the end, are beliefs of various sorts, with varying strengths and complex interconnections, and any given belief's claim to be accepted or rejected depends on how well it fits into the total scheme.

So far, I have spoken as though the Aristotelian strategy—whether we call it negative coherentism or neoclassical broad foundationalism—simply starts from one's *own* belief system, whatever it may be. But Aristotle speaks of starting from the *endoxa*, or reputable beliefs; and the reputability of a belief is determined, as we have seen, by a) the number of its adherents, and b) the wisdom of its adherents. So if something I do not believe is nevertheless believed by the majority, or by the wise (or

by the majority of the wise, or the wisest among the majority, and so forth), that, according to Aristotle, gives me some (prima facie, defeasible) reason to believe it myself.

Why this appeal to collective belief? Why can I not simply start from my own beliefs and work out from there, rather than including everybody else's beliefs too?

Well, in a sense it is ultimately from my own *endoxa* that I will reach whatever conclusion I reach:

For learning comes about for everyone in this way, through things less known by nature to things more known. And this is the task: just as in the case of actions it is to make, on the basis of things good for an individual, the things fully good to be good for the individual, so here it is to make, on the basis of things better known to oneself, the things known by nature to be known to oneself. Now the things known and primary for individuals are often barely known, and have little or nothing of what is; but all the same, on the basis of things poorly knowable, but knowable to oneself, one must try to know the things that are fully knowable, proceeding, as has been said, by way of these very less knowable things.⁵¹

But Aristotle thinks I will have good reasons for including the *endoxa* of others—the collective wisdom of mankind, as it were—among my *endoxa* or *phainomena*. The pursuit of knowledge is a cooperative endeavor,⁵² and will be more successful if everyone is allowed to make a contribution:

Now concerning all these matters one ought to try to seek conviction by means of arguments, using the appearances as witnesses and examples. For it is best that all men appear to agree with what will be said, and if not, that they all agree in some way at least—just as they will do when led over. For each man has something personal to contribute toward the truth, on the basis of which contributions it is necessary to demonstrate in some way concerning these things. For to those proceeding on the basis of things said truly but not clearly, what is said clearly will arise as well, so long as they continue to take what is better known in itself in exchange for what is customarily said in a confused way.⁵³

For it is possible for the many, among whom each is not upright, to be better nonetheless, when they come together, than those upright men—not individually but as a group, just as meals to which all contribute are better than those supplied by a single expenditure.

For among those who are many, each has a portion of excellence and sagacity; and when they come together, just as the multitude becomes one man, many-footed and many-handed and having many perceptive organs, so too in the case of character traits and of thought. Hence the many also judge more ably the works of culture and of the poets; for each one can judge a different particular portion, and all together they can judge them all.⁵⁴

It is reasonable, then, for those seeking knowledge to cast their nets as widely as possible, and so to include the *endoxa* of humanity as a whole among their starting-points; this justifies including the beliefs of everyone or most people among the *endoxa*. And we certainly have reason as well to include among our *endoxa* the beliefs of those we consider wise; for example, we generally accept what theoretical physicists tell us about the nature of the universe, not because what they have to say seems particularly plausible to us, but because it seems so to them, and we respect their judgment. (We seem to accept an epistemological division of labor here.)

Does this Aristotelian approach to the validation of first principles enable us to sail successfully between the Scylla of pure proceduralism and the Charybdis of intuitionism? I think it does. First principles are not chosen arbitrarily, on the basis of emotional whims; their identification is the product of a rational process. Thus we avoid the difficulties raised by Hume. On the other hand, reasoning plays an inferential and justificatory role with regard to first principles, not just a causal one. Thus we avoid the difficulties raised by Plato. Both Plato and Hume assume that a conclusion cannot be rationally justified on the basis of inference alone unless we can prove ahead of time that the premises of the inference are reliable.⁵⁵ This assumption Aristotle rejects.

IV. Objectivism on Theoretical Rationality: Rand as Platonist

Ayn Rand agrees with Aristotle against Hume that reason can evaluate basic premises and ultimate values. Thus, her conception of rationality is substantive rather than procedural. But she emphatically rejects as “social metaphysics” the idea that the search for truth should rely in any fundamental way on *endoxa*. In this respect she recognizes, at least with regard to ethics, that she is departing from Aristotle:

No philosopher has given a rational, objectively demonstrable, scientific answer to the question of *why* man needs a code of values. So long as that question remained unanswered, no rational, scientific, *objective* code of ethics could be discovered or defined. The greatest of all philosophers, Aristotle, did not regard ethics as an exact science; he based his ethical system on observations of what the

noble and wise men of his time chose to do, leaving unanswered the questions of: *why* they chose to do it and *why* he evaluated them as noble and wise. . . . Most philosophers [Aristotle included, presumably] took the existence of ethics for granted, as the given, as a historical fact, and were not concerned with discovering its metaphysical cause or objective validation.⁵⁶

This evaluation is mistaken in one respect; Aristotle most certainly is interested in identifying the “metaphysical cause” that will explain “*why* man needs a code of values.” The first book of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, for example, attempts to ground values on the requirements of man’s nature as a well-functioning rational animal, and connects ethics to the teleological biology and metaphysics defended elsewhere in Aristotle’s works. (Rand’s own metaethics is heavily dependent on Aristotle at just this point.⁵⁷) But Rand is correct in pointing out that Aristotle’s identification and elaboration of those requirements often relies heavily on common ethical beliefs that are not explicitly argued for.

I have described Aristotle as a neoclassical broad foundationalist. Rand, by contrast, is best described as a classical narrow foundationalist.⁵⁸ For her, the privileged and indefeasible foundations of knowledge are the data of sense-perception (and perhaps, in a different sense, the axioms too).⁵⁹ Rand in fact defines reason as “the faculty that identifies and integrates the material provided by man’s senses.”⁶⁰ Thus, it cannot be rational to deny or question the senses; accepting and building-up from the data of perception is what reason does, and to the extent that we refuse to do this we are abdicating our reason, not exercising it. This connection to the senses thus ensures that Randian rationality is substantive, not purely procedural.

But nothing beyond the perceptual level can be described as foundational. Thus, Rand holds that beliefs are justified only when they have been traced back to their experiential foundations in sense-perception:

When you talk about discovering the ultimate constituents of the universe, remember that in order to discover them, no matter by what calculations or by what machinery, you had to bring them to your perceptual level. You would have to say “this particle” is that which acts in such and such a way on subatomic particles, which act in such and such a way on atoms, which act in such and such a way on molecules, and all of that results in a material object such as this glass as distinguished from other material objects such as this ash-tray. Unless you bring it back to the perceptual level, it’s not knowledge.⁶¹

Peikoff elaborates Rand’s view as follows:

Epistemologically . . . *the perceptual level comes first*. If one seeks to prove any item of human knowledge, on any subject, he must begin with the facts of perception. These facts constitute the base of cognition. They are the self-evident and the incontestable, by reference to which we validate all later knowledge Human knowledge is . . . like a city of towering skyscrapers, with the uppermost story of each building resting on the lower ones, and they on the still lower, until one reaches the foundation, where the builder started. . . . “Reduction” is the process of identifying in logical sequence the intermediate steps that relate a cognitive item to perceptual data. . . . Such retracing is a requirement of objectivity.⁶²

The problem with this approach, it seems to me, is that in most cases we simply have no idea what the experiential foundations of our beliefs are. I know the Earth is round, but I do not remember when I learned it. Peikoff sometimes suggests that I do not need to retrace the actual steps by which I learned it; a hypothetical story is sufficient. But in this case I know more or less what the actual story looks like: Somebody told me—a parent or a teacher. And they did not figure it out for themselves either; they too were told, by somebody. So can my belief in the roundness of the Earth ultimately rest on *endoxa*, or do I have to have some independent grounds? If the latter, then I am sunk, for I doubt I could formulate a valid scientific experiment to confirm the roundness of the Earth. And even if I could formulate one, I simply do not have the time or the resources to test it. Now certainly my belief that the Earth is round coheres awfully well with the rest of my experience; but such mere coherence does not seem to yield quite the skyscraper structure Rand and Peikoff are after. It is more like a spider web or a galaxy. So I do not know how to justify my belief that the Earth is round without appealing to *endoxa*. Yet surely it is something I know. Indeed, I have—and am justified in having—far more confidence in that belief than in any theory about how to justify it, whether Randian, Aristotelian, or what have you.

Historical beliefs seem even harder to justify without relying on *endoxa*; consider, for example, the belief that the Norman Conquest occurred in 1066. How is that to be reduced to sense-perception? Ultimately, we have to take the word of someone now dead.

Presumably, the Randian answer would be that at least in some contexts, it is permissible to rely on *endoxa*:

Man is the only species that can transmit and expand his store of knowledge from generation to generation; the knowledge potentially available to man is greater than any one man could begin to acquire in his own lifespan; every man gains an incalculable benefit from the knowledge discovered by others. . . . the division of labor . . . enables a man to devote his effort to a particular field of

work and to trade with others who specialize in other fields. This form of cooperation allows all men who take part in it to achieve a greater knowledge, skill, and productive return on their effort.⁶³

But from the perspective of a view (like Rand's) that denies foundational status to *endoxa*, if this reliance on the word of others is to be rational, we must first be able to justify the claim that other people are, if not perfect, then at least reasonably reliable sources of information. That is a proposition that Rand herself sometimes seems to have doubts about! But even if it is true, as Rand must ultimately believe, it is hard to see how one could come up with an argument for that proposition that did not itself rely on information not directly available to the senses. We cannot first come to the theoretical conclusion that other people's testimony is generally reliable, and only then begin to accept such testimony; on the contrary, we must rely all along on the testimony of others (parents, teachers) in order to build up the picture of the world that licenses such theoretical conclusions. Indeed, my general objection to classical and narrow forms of foundationalism is my strong suspicion that any foundationalist justification of our ordinary beliefs is likely to succeed only to the extent that it implicitly relies on some of those ordinary beliefs themselves. Such an austere foundationalist project, if followed faithfully without any illicit moves along the way, can end, I think, only in skepticism.

But suppose I am wrong about that. Suppose that in fact all our ordinary beliefs can be derived from the data of sense-perception. Why should that matter? We may originally have started at the perceptual level,⁶⁴ but that is not where inquiry starts now. So what Rand is asking us to do, in effect, is to start from our ordinary beliefs and trace our way from them down to the primitive and indubitable perceptual foundations. Accordingly, once we have managed to demonstrate that our ordinary beliefs can be derived from those foundations, then (and only then) will we be justified in treating those ordinary beliefs as knowledge. The picture, *mutatis mutandis*, is pure Plato. Indeed, every foundationalist story that asks us to start somewhere other than where we are must in reality have the ascent-and-descent (or descent-and-ascent) structure of Platonic dialectic, however much it may lay claim to the unidirectional skyscraper structure of Cartesian apodictic.

But, again, even if Rand's Platonic ambitions could succeed, why must we who are already here at the level of the appearances be required to embark on a holy pilgrimage back to the perceptual level in order to justify those appearances? What reason do we have to hand over, to a mere handful of citizens in our epistemological republic, absolute supremacy over all the rest, so that none can so much as breathe a single minute longer without not just the permission but the command of the elite handful? After all, it is not the handful of citizens themselves—the data of perception—that are making this demand for dictatorial powers; it is their obsequious flatterer, the philosophy of austere foundationalism—one of the prospective subjects of the proposed elite, and one who has had a notoriously bad time managing to live

peacefully with its neighbors. Perhaps it is time we asked it to live elsewhere.

Yet, it may be objected, even if our ordinary beliefs do not depend on the perceptual level for their justification, might they not depend on it for their status as knowledge—given that knowledge presumably includes not only justification (in the internalist sense) but also some reliable connection to the facts? Yes, they might. But then again, they might not. To the extent that our beliefs rely on sense-perception, they are largely true because our perceptual organs are reliable trackers of truth (though again, we do not have to know this before we go trusting our senses; we find it out later, by using the information thus obtained). But this is not the only source of reliable beliefs. The collective wisdom of mankind is another. Because cultural beliefs and practices that are mistaken are (at least somewhat) less likely to survive, the cultural beliefs and practices we unthinkingly absorb from our social environment have passed through a kind of filter, and so have a certain reliability even if the process by which those beliefs and practices were initially formed was completely irrational. Likewise, turning from cultural to biological evolution, we may have reliable tendencies to form certain beliefs, not as a result of the believer's own sense-perception or social environment, but rather because the tendency to form such beliefs was favored by natural selection (generally because the beliefs were true). I am not endorsing the notion of innate ideas; I am inclined to agree with Aristotle and Rand that conceptual contents must ultimately derive from sense-perception. But how one is inclined, once one has such contents, to join them into beliefs is a different matter. More importantly, I am not committed to any particular view about the extent to which the reliability of our ordinary beliefs depends on sense-perception, as opposed to biological evolution, as opposed to cultural evolution (whether in its conscious, competitive Millian or its unconscious, filtering Hayekian variety). My point is that these are precisely the questions we *don't* need to start off with an answer to before we can have confidence in our beliefs. We do not have to prove that the appearances are produced by a reliable mechanism before we can start relying on them—which is a good thing, because it is only by relying on them that we are eventually able to prove their reliability.

V. Objectivism on Practical Rationality: Rand as Humean

I have been arguing that Rand's conception of rationality is ultimately Platonic: its function is to lead us from our ordinary beliefs, which fall short of knowledge, to an insight into self-evident truths, which will then transform our ordinary beliefs (or such as survive) into knowledge. But in fact it is only with regard to *theoretical* rationality that Rand turns out to be a Platonist. Her conception of *practical* rationality ends up, strangely enough—and certainly despite her vociferously voiced intentions—as a variant of the Humean conception.

Consider the contrast between Aristotle and Rand on the question of the

ultimate value—which both agree is one’s own well-being, one’s life as a flourishing rational animal. For Aristotle, this ultimate end or good is not chosen; it is implicit in every desire and every choice, and all our other ends are to be understood as subordinate to it. The end is, as it were, forced on us; and the task of practical reason is simply to identify it.

Rand sometimes talks this way, too. But her official theory seems to be that the value of this ultimate good depends on its being chosen: once a person chooses to live, he is committed to valuing the means to this end, including the correct moral code. But since these values presuppose that one has chosen to live, the basic choice is not, it would seem, subject to moral appraisal.⁶⁵ Now Rand is perhaps not quite consistent on this point. Her rather contemptuous language suggests that she is in fact prepared to pass moral judgment on those who choose not to live. But her official doctrine, as I read it, is that moral considerations come into play only as a result of the choice to live. It is difficult to avoid the implication—though Rand clearly wishes to—that the choice to live is arbitrary, a groundless, subjective, existentialist commitment for or against which rationality has nothing to say. The role of practical reason, it would seem, is limited to assessing the means to the ultimate end, one’s life, once it is chosen. But that role does not extend to an evaluation of the end itself. The picture, *mutatis mutandis*, is pure Hume.

It may seem odd for Rand to veer toward the Platonic extreme with regard to theoretical rationality, and yet swerve in the opposite direction, toward the Humean extreme, when it comes to practical rationality. But I think the two mistakes are connected. Once one has limited one’s domain of acceptable starting points to a particular subclass, one’s ethical reasoning too must limit itself to what can be established on the basis of that subclass. This does not lead Plato toward a Humean conception of practical reason because Plato has the Form of the Good in his subclass. But Rand’s subclass consists in the data of sense-perception alone. And so she is committed to accepting, in the way of an ethical theory, only what can be defended on the mere basis of perceptual data. And when you start from a basis like that, it is a lot easier to derive a procedural account of practical rationality than to derive a substantive one. Hence, it is Rand’s Platonism about theoretical rationality, I think, that finally drives her toward a Humean position on practical rationality.

VI. Ethical Egoism in Three Varieties

In turn, I shall now argue, Rand’s Platonic conception of theoretical rationality and Humean conception of practical rationality ultimately force her, in her nonfiction writings, to a Hobbesian version of ethical egoism, one that is inconsistent with the more attractive Aristotelian version expressed in her fiction.

Consider this question: Why should an egoist care about other people’s rights? Among those who base morality on self-interest, three sorts of answers have traditionally been given, which I shall call the Hobbesian approach, the Aristotelian

approach, and the Kantian approach. According to the Hobbesian approach, justice (that is, respect for the rights of others) is valuable as an instrumental means to one's own well-being. According to the Aristotelian approach, justice is valuable as a constitutive means to, or an intrinsic component of, one's own well-being. An analogy may help to make the distinction clear: Suppose my purpose is to be well-dressed. Then buying a necktie is an instrumental means to my goal, while actually wearing the tie is a constitutive means to my goal. In the first case, the means is external to the end, while in the second the means is part of the end. The Hobbesian approach is associated with such writers as Epicurus, Benjamin Tucker, and of course Hobbes; the most famous statement of the Aristotelian approach is in Book II of Plato's *Republic*, though it is obviously prominent in Aristotle and the whole Aristotelian tradition.

The Hobbesian and the Aristotelian egoists agree, however, that justice is justified as a means (instrumental or constitutive) to the end of the agent's well-being. The Kantian egoist, on the other hand, thinks one can derive justice from self-interest without showing that justice is a means of any sort. Thus, a three-fold classification exists:

Hobbesian egoism: Justice is to be valued because it is an instrumental means to one's well-being.

Aristotelian egoism: Justice is to be valued because it is a constitutive means to one's well-being.

Kantian egoism: Justice is to be valued because in valuing one's own well-being one is inadvertently committed, by some principle of consistency, to valuing the right of others to promote their well-being.

This last, Kantian-style argument has its original roots in the Stoic theory of *oikeiôsis*⁶⁶; more recent versions have been defended by such philosophers as Alan Gewirth, Eric Mack, Henry Veatch, and Al Decker.⁶⁷

Which of these three versions of egoism best captures Ayn Rand's ethical approach? In fact, I believe that all three strands can be found in Rand's ethical thought and that, although she never unambiguously disentangles them, her novels lean toward the Aristotelian approach, while her philosophical writings lean toward the Hobbesian approach.

VII. The Hobgoblin of Kantian Consistency

The Kantian strand in Rand's egoism is the weakest and least prominent of the three, but it is nevertheless worth commenting on. The Kantian strand shows up in the following passages:

The only "obligation" involved in individual rights is an obligation imposed, not by the state, but by the nature of reality (i.e., by the law of identity): *consistency*, which, in this case, means the obligation to respect the rights of others, if one wishes one's own

rights to be recognized and protected.⁶⁸

When you declare that men are irrational animals and propose to treat them as such, you define thereby your own character and can no longer claim the sanction of reason—as no advocate of contradictions can claim it. There can be no ‘right’ to destroy the source of rights. . . . To force a man to drop his own mind and to accept your will as a substitute . . . is to attempt to exist in defiance of reality. Reality demands of man that he act for his own rational interest; your gun demands of him that he act against it.⁶⁹

The idea here seems to be the Kantian one that if one wants one’s own rights respected, one must respect the rights of others. Otherwise, one is making a special exception in one’s own case, in defiance of the “fact of reality” that others are as human as we are, and so must be subject to the same rules.

In a similar vein, Kantian egoists have occasionally offered something like the following argument, of which there is some trace in Rand’s works:

1. Each person ought to promote his own interest.
2. It ought to be the case that each person promotes his own interest. (1)
3. It ought not to be the case that a person is prevented from promoting his own interest. (2)
4. If I sacrifice you to my interest, then I prevent you from promoting your own interest.
5. If I sacrifice you to my interest, then I cause to be the case something that ought not to be the case. (3, 4)
6. One ought not to cause to be the case something that ought not to be the case.
7. One ought not to sacrifice others to one’s own interests. (5, 6)

My principal objection to this argument is that “ought” is ambiguous and that there is no one single sense of “ought” according to which both a) this argument proves what it sets out to prove, and b) this argument is consistent with the egoism that Rand espouses.

We can distinguish between two sorts of relativity, which I shall call agent-relativity and perspective-relativity.

Agent-relativity: Applies to properties that essentially involve a relation to a particular person.

Perspective-relativity: Applies to propositions whose truth-value is relative to the perspective of particular persons.

Agent-relativity exists when it is essential to a certain property that it be or involve a relation to a particular agent. For example, parenthood is agent-relative: my mother is a parent in relation to me but not in relation to you. Implicit in my mother’s parenthood is a relation to me; her property of parenthood is really the property of

parenthood_(in relation to Roderick Long).

The Greek Sophists used to stump people with the following argument:

1. Is that your dog?—yes.
2. Is that dog a mother?—yes.
3. Then that dog is your mother.

Where this Sophistic argument goes wrong is that (1) really means that the dog is a pet_(in relation to you), while (2) really means that the dog is a mother_(in relation to her pups). Hence, there is no way to reach the desired conclusion “That dog is a mother_(in relation to you).”

The other sort of relativity is perspective-relativity. According to perspective-relativity, the same proposition can be true from one person’s perspective and false from that of another person.

I think there are no cases of perspective-relativity; but here is a case that might be mistaken for one: When I say “I was born in Los Angeles,” it is true (because I was). But when you say “I was born in Los Angeles,” it is false (if you were not). So it seems that the same proposition is true for me and false for you. In fact, this is not a case of perspective-relativity because “I was born in Los Angeles” does not express the same proposition when uttered by different people (since the referent of “I” changes). But if you thought it were the same proposition, you would take this to be a case of perspective-relativity. (Again, I cannot give you a genuine case of perspective-relativity because none exist; but I hope this example makes clear what you would have to take perspective-relativity to be like if you thought there were such a thing.)

Now, Rand claims that values are relational. “X is valuable” must always be understood as short for “X is valuable to A.”⁷⁰ Clearly, Rand is endorsing the agent-relativity of value; she rejects the idea that anything is just valuable, period, without any implicit subscript. When Rand claims that each agent’s life is a value, she is not saying that, for example, Zeke’s life is impersonally valuable or even interpersonally valuable. Instead, she means that Zeke’s life is valuable_(to Zeke); Lola’s life is valuable_(to Lola); and so on.

On the other hand, she does not think values are perspective-relative. It might seem that she does, since she may grant that one and the same thing may be valuable for Zeke but not valuable for Lola. But she does not mean that the proposition “X is valuable” is true from Zeke’s perspective and false from Lola’s perspective. Rather, she means that “X is valuable_(to Zeke) but not valuable_(to Lola)” is true from both their perspectives.

The question is: Does Rand also hold that “ought” is agent-relative? One might be tempted to answer no, if one confused agent-relativity with perspective-relativity; that is why I have gone to the trouble of distinguishing them. If “ought” is agent-relative but not perspective-relative, then it may be true from Zeke’s perspective that Lola ought_(for Lola) to do something without its being the case that Lola ought_(for Zeke) to do that thing. I do think Rand is committed (whether she realizes it or

not) to treating “ought” as agent-relative. What an agent ought to do is determined by its values; I ought to take those actions which promote my well-being. In other words: it ought_(for Lola) to be the case that p just in case p promotes what is valuable_(to Lola). An agent-neutral value is what Rand calls an “intrinsic value,” and she will have none of it.⁷¹ But if oughts are supposed to be founded on values, it is hard to see how one could possibly get from an egoistic, agent-relative value to an intrinsic, agent-neutral “ought.” (Indeed, Rand appears to reject intrinsic “oughts” in “Causality versus Duty.”)

If “ought” is agent-relative, then the Kantian egoist argument does not prove what it promised to. See what becomes of it when we add in the agent-relativizing subscripts:

1. Every A ought_(for A) to promote A’s interest.
2. It ought_(for A) to be the case that A promotes A’s interest. (1)
3. It ought_(for A) not to be the case that A is prevented from promoting A’s interest. (2)
4. If I sacrifice you to my interest, then I prevent you from promoting your own interest.
5. If I sacrifice you to my interest, then I cause to be the case something that ought_(for you) not to be the case. (3, 4)
6. I ought_(for you) not to cause to be the case something that ought_(for you) not to be the case.
7. I ought_(for you) not to sacrifice you to my interests. (5, 6)

All (7) means is that it would be valuable for you that I not prevent you from pursuing your interest; but this tells us nothing about my obligations. What the argument intends to show is that I have some reason to refrain from interfering with you; but for that we would need something of the form “I ought_(for me) not to sacrifice you to my interests,” in which case we would need an argument for getting us from “ought_(for you)” to “ought_(for me).”

Now there are two ways in which the first premise might be read so as to make the argument yield interpersonal obligations; but neither could be acceptable to Rand. We might read “Every A ought to promote A’s self-interest” as “Every A ought_(everybody) to promote A’s self-interest.” This would mean that it is a value for each person that not only he but *all* persons promote their own interests. Now such a claim may be consistent with ethical egoism; but it is not itself the thesis of ethical egoism, and so to derive conclusions about interpersonal obligations from it is not to derive them from ethical egoism. Alternatively, the “ought” in “Every A ought to promote A’s self-interest” might be taken in an intrinsic and impersonal sense of agent-neutral duty. But this is a sense of “ought” for which Randian egoism makes no room. (There is of course a sense in which Rand must grant that it is true for everyone, and also true impersonally, that every A ought to pursue A’s interest; but that is a denial of perspective-relativity, not of agent-relativity.)

And yet Rand does occasionally appear to fall into just this fallacy:

If man is to live on earth, it is *right* for him to use his mind, it is *right* to act on his own free judgment, it is *right* to work for his values and to keep the product of his work. If life on earth is his purpose, he has a *right* to live as a rational being.⁷²

But it is not clear how an egoist like Rand can get from claims about what it is right for me to do (a statement about my obligations) to claims about what rights I have (a statement about other people's obligations). Rand's argument is often compared to that of Herbert Spencer:

Those who hold that life is valuable, hold, by implication, that men ought not to be prevented from carrying on life-sustaining activities. In other words, if it is said to be "right" that they should carry them on, then, by permutation, we get the assertion that they "have a right" to carry them on.⁷³

But Spencer is presumably starting with an impersonal, agent-neutral conception of value, so his argument is not subject to the same criticisms as Rand's.

VIII. Hobbes in the Head, Aristotle in the Heart

The Kantian strand is a minor one in Rand's writings. Her more usual argument is that respect for others' rights is a necessary means to one's well-being, rather than a Kantian commitment with which egoists are mysteriously and nonteleologically saddled. But it is unclear whether respect for others' rights is an instrumental or a constitutive means.

Rand identifies the ultimate standard of value as "man's life" or "survival qua man." But this phrase can be interpreted in the following two ways:

Bare survival qua man: Survival is to be understood in a merely biological sense, as staying alive. The qualification "qua man" merely places a strategic constraint on the means to that end (i.e., it indicates that in determining the necessary means to such survival one must take into account the nature of the entity whose survival is being sought). So long as one is human and stays alive (long enough), one is surviving qua man.

Flourishing survival qua man: Survival qua man is a certain kind of survival, not just staying alive as such. The qualification "qua man" is a constitutive constraint on the nature of the end itself (i.e., some kinds of survival count as truly human while others do not). One can thus be human and stay alive indefinitely without surviving qua man.

These two conceptions of survival qua man correspond to the Hobbesian and Aristotelian approaches, respectively. If one's end is mere survival, then, à la

Hobbes, justice could at best be an external means to that end, not an intrinsic part of it. Only if, à la Aristotle, one's end is a particular type of survival, a particular manner of living, could justice be a constitutive rather than a merely instrumental means to that end.

With this distinction in mind, consider Rand's characterization of survival *qua man*:

[A] It does not mean a *momentary* or a merely *physical* survival. It does not mean the momentary physical survival of a mindless brute, waiting for another brute to crush his skull. It does not mean the momentary physical survival of a crawling aggregate of muscles who is willing to accept any terms, obey any thug and surrender any values, for the sake of what is known as "survival at any price," which may or may not last a week or a year.

[B] "Man's survival *qua man*" means the terms, methods, conditions and goals required for the survival of a rational being through the whole of his lifespan

[C] Man cannot survive as anything but man. He *can* abandon his means of survival, his mind, he *can* turn himself into a subhuman creature and he *can* turn his life into a brief span of agony—just as his body can exist for a while in the process of disintegration by disease.

[D] But he *cannot* succeed, as a subhuman, in achieving anything but the subhuman. . . . Man has to be man by choice—and it is the task of ethics to teach him how to live like man.⁷⁴

At [A], Rand stresses that she does not mean "a *momentary* or a merely *physical* survival;" this might be taken to favor flourishing rather than bare survival. But the alternative to "momentary" could just as easily be long-term (but otherwise "mere" or bare) survival. Rand's rejection of "merely physical" survival points still more strongly in the direction of flourishing; but still, she might mean only that a merely physical survival is undesirable because it is unlikely to be long-term. On an Aristotelian reading, more than merely physical survival is built into the goal, so that "survival *qua man*" means something richer than merely staying alive. But on a Hobbesian reading, more than merely physical survival is only an instrumental means to long-term survival, because without it, the best you can get is momentary survival. Now, Rand first says that she does not mean momentary or merely physical survival, as if these were two different things and she was rejecting both. But she immediately goes on to link the two, speaking of the "momentary physical survival of a mindless brute" as if there were just one thing she was rejecting. So, once again, it is unclear whether survival *qua man* places a constitutive constraint on the goal or just a strategic constraint on the means to reaching the goal. The distinction in [D] between being

human and being subhuman seems to favor the former, while [B]’s emphasis on long-term survival favors the latter. [C]’s suggestion that an immoral life is like survival in a diseased state might seem to tell in favor of flourishing survival, until one notices the emphasis on the brevity of the diseased life, which seems to take us back to strategic considerations. Is there something inherently bad about living a subhuman or diseased life, over and above the fact that it shortens one’s life expectancy? Is the goal mere quantity of life, or is it quality of life as well?

Some evidence for the merely quantitative interpretation is offered by Rand’s claim that an indestructible being (she says an indestructible robot, but her argument seems to turn on its indestructibility rather than on its roboticity) could have no values.

... try to imagine an immortal, indestructible robot, an entity which moves and acts, but which cannot be affected by anything, which cannot be changed in any respect, which cannot be damaged, injured or destroyed. Such an entity would not be able to have any values; it would have nothing to gain or lose; it could not regard anything as *for* or *against* it, as serving or threatening its welfare, as fulfilling or frustrating its interests. It could have no interests and no goals.⁷⁵

Now an immortal, indestructible being could surely have interests and goals in the Aristotelian sense; it could succeed or fail in achieving a certain kind of life appropriate to its nature. But of course it could not succeed or fail in achieving survival in the sense of bare survival. So this passage seems to favor the bare-survival reading. Yet things are not perfectly clear, since Rand also tells us that this being is not merely indestructible but altogether incapable of being affected or changed; so it is not clear what Rand would say about an entity that can be affected but not destroyed. Perhaps Rand did not see the distinction between instrumental and constitutive means, and so never satisfactorily resolved this problem.

It might be thought that Rand’s distinction between standard and purpose should clarify the issue:

The Objectivist ethics holds man’s life as the *standard* of value—and *his own life* as the ethical *purpose* of every individual man. The difference between “standard” and “purpose” in this context is as follows: a “standard” is an abstract principle that serves as a measurement or gauge to guide a man’s choices in the achievement of a concrete, specific purpose. “That which is required for the survival of man *qua* man” is an abstract principle that applies to every individual man. The task of applying this principle to a concrete, specific purpose—the purpose of living a life proper to a rational

being—belongs to every individual man, and the life he has to live is his own.

Man must choose his actions, values and goals by the standard of that which is proper to man—in order to achieve, maintain, fulfill and enjoy that ultimate value, that end in itself, which is his own life.⁷⁶

But this distinction fails to remove the ambiguity. On the Hobbesian interpretation, what Rand means is that, because it is too difficult to decide everything on a case by case basis, we need some rules about what generally promotes our purpose (bare survival), and so we set up a standard of value that looks a lot like flourishing, but is in fact only a set of generalizations about how to stay alive.⁷⁷ On the Aristotelian interpretation, by contrast, what Rand means is that we must shape our purpose—our own life—so as to make it answer to a higher standard, the standard of a truly human life. The Hobbesian view makes the standard merely an instrumental strategy for achieving an independently defined purpose; the Aristotelian view makes the standard an independently defined criterion to which the purpose must answer.

Some of Rand's arguments do seem to push her in the direction of Hobbesian instrumentalism. Consider her explanation of the value of honesty, as expressed in her reply to Leonard Peikoff's hypothetical attempt to construct a fraudulent investment scheme (involving a nonexistent gold mine):

Ayn Rand then analyzed the example patiently, for thirty or forty minutes, showing me on my own material how one lie would lead necessarily to another, how I would be forced into contradictory lies, how I would gradually become trapped in my own escalating deceptions, and why, therefore, sooner or later, in one form or another, my con-man scheme would have to backfire.⁷⁸

Each of the con man's lies clashes with one or more facts and, therefore, creates a risk of his detection and exposure by anyone with access to the facts. Anyone who knows something—about mining, or the distribution of gold ore, or the science of geology, or the country claimed as the site, or the policies of its government, or the agencies of assay, or economic forecasting; or about con men in general, or about this one in particular, about his associates, haunts, accent, spending habits, or MO—becomes a threat, to be dealt with by further lies; lies designed to cash in on one person's special ignorance, contradictory lies to stay clear of another person's special knowledge. In the end, if we suppose that the loot runs out and the liar has not been caught, the very premises that led him to carry out the scheme—successfully, as he thinks—will most likely prompt

him to embark on another one, involving a new pack of lies. . . . The liar . . . may get away with any given scheme; he may win the battle. But if such are the battles he is fighting, he has to lose the war.⁷⁹

This defense of honesty is blatantly instrumentalist; the virtuous person refrains from defrauding others, not because he finds dishonesty inherently distasteful but because in the long run the costs of fraudulent behavior will outweigh its benefits. Admittedly, there is a noninstrumentalist, even a Nietzschean, overtone in this argument: because all facts are interconnected, to deny one is ultimately to fight against all reality—but the details of the argument are purely Hobbesian.⁸⁰

Ironically, it is far from clear that a Randian hero would be unable to carry off such a swindle. Peikoff's story sounds suspiciously like Francisco d'Anconia's successful and noble scheme to defraud the looters in *Atlas Shrugged*. Moreover, to dismiss real-life examples of successful knavery by claiming that success in risky activity will lead one to engage in further risky activity, eventually leading to failure, seems as good (or bad) an argument against the intrepid astronaut, the jungle explorer, or the enterprising entrepreneur as against the con man. And if the con man is versed in Rand's philosophy, he might dismiss such Randian scruples as evidence of cowardice, laziness, lack of self-esteem, or belief in a malevolent universe. As Adeimantos in Plato's *Republic* remarks, in response to a similar argument:

But surely, someone will say, it isn't easy for the wicked always to pass undiscovered. Nor indeed, we shall say, does any other great thing just fall into one's lap. Yet nonetheless, if we are going to fare well, we must follow this course to which the arguments lead. For in order to pass undiscovered we shall join together in confederacies and fellowships, and there are teachers of persuasion who supply wisdom in matters of public speaking and judicial proceedings—on the basis of which things we shall alternately persuade and coerce, so as to seize more than our share without being brought to justice.⁸¹

Moreover, Rand's argument (as Peikoff presents it) proves too much. Peikoff insists that the argument applies only to "lying in order to gain some value from others, as against lying to defend oneself from criminals, which is perfectly moral."⁸² But why this qualification? The argument should work equally well against the virtuous lies too. Just think of all the lies that an undercover cop, or a member of the resistance in a totalitarian regime, has to tell. Much better to confess to the bad guys right away.

There is a deeper objection, however, to the idea that dishonesty is contrary to our self-interest simply because it is too difficult to keep track of all the lies we have told and to keep them all consistent. I challenge anyone to convince himself that

that is the reason Howard Roark (in *The Fountainhead*) does not cheat his customers. Clearly, Roark's reason for being honest is not that he is insufficiently clever to remember which lies he has told to whom but rather that he does not choose to live by exploiting other people—for which his reason is surely not that he is afraid of being punished (no such fear stopped him from blowing up Cortlandt Homes) but rather that, in the words of Rostand's Cyrano, he is “too proud to be a parasite.” Or, as John Galt puts it, “You do not care to live as a dependent, least of all a dependent on the stupidity of others.”⁸³ This last could be taken in a Hobbesian-instrumentalist way—it is a bad idea, in instrumental terms, to become dependent—but that is not the spirit of the passage.

When asked what advantage he had ever gained for himself from philosophy, Aristotle said, “That I do, without being subject to compulsion, what some do through fear of the laws.”⁸⁴

The Randian hero sees parasitism and dependence as undesirable states in themselves, regardless of whether they lead to further punishment from some external source; the spirit is Aristotle flavored with Nietzsche.

The spirit of Rand's novels, then, is decidedly Aristotelian: her fictional heroes are motivated by an outlook that sees immoral action as somehow intrinsically ignoble and unworthy of a heroic human being, regardless of its consequences. But when Rand tried in her nonfiction writing to develop the philosophical foundations of the moral outlook expressed in her fiction, and in particular to make explicit her insight that parasitism was in conflict with self-interest, she made the mistake of thinking of self-interest in instrumental terms, at least implicitly, thus giving herself a much harder job. So it was, I suspect, that the Hobbesian strand began to creep in much more strongly, though always mixed with the Aristotelian strand. In order to justify the strength of libertarian rights as binding constraints, despite her instrumentalist outlook, Rand had either to make implausible causal claims or else bring in the Kantian strand as well. That, I think, is why her ethical theory ultimately collapses into inconsistency.

When we move from Rand's philosophy to her fiction, we find ourselves in a richer, subtler, healthier, very un-Hobbesian world—a world where quality of life matters more than quantity. Here, for example, Rand can countenance the notion of self-interested suicides. In *Atlas Shrugged*, Cheryl Taggart is said to commit suicide out of self-preservation, and John Galt says he would selfishly commit suicide rather than let Dagny be tortured to death; this suggests that the goal is not life-as-meresurvival but life-as-flourishing. Likewise, when asked by Mr. Thompson whether he wants to live, Galt replies: “I want it so passionately that I will accept no substitute.” Clearly, Galt regards plain longevity that falls short of human flourishing not as life but as a mere substitute; his notion of life is Aristotelian rather than Hobbesian.

For every intellect chooses what is best for itself, and the decent man obeys his intellect. Now it is true also, concerning the upright

man, that he performs many actions for the sake of his friends and his country, and if necessary dies for them. For he will discard both wealth and honours and in general the goods people fight over, gaining the fine for himself; for he would prefer a short time of intense pleasure to a long mild one, and a year of fine living to many years of living at random, and a single fine and great action to many slight ones. Now this like as not results for those who die for others; indeed they choose a great fine thing for themselves.⁸⁵

The Randian hero clearly agrees with Aristotle in preferring “a short time of intense pleasure to a long mild one, and a year of fine living to many years of living at random, and a single fine and great action to many slight ones.” But it is difficult to see how this preference can be justified once one identifies mere bare survival as one’s standard of value.

In “The Ethics of Emergencies,” Rand does offer a justification of giving one’s life to save a loved one:

If the person to be saved is a stranger, it is morally proper to save him only when the danger to one’s own life is minimal. . . . If it is the man or woman one loves, then one can be willing to give one’s own life to save him or her—for the selfish reason that life without the loved person could be unbearable.⁸⁶

But if, as the preponderance of her writings suggests, survival qua man is to be understood thinly, such a person would be making a serious mistake. They would in effect be substituting a hedonistic standard—the presence or absence of unbearable feelings—for the standard of survival, rather than bringing their feelings into accord with their objective values through cognitive psychotherapy.

Indeed, the Hobbesian element, while far more prevalent in Rand’s philosophy than in her fiction, is not the whole story even there. One also finds Rand claiming that the rational man values other people because they embody the same human nature as the rational man’s own highest value—himself.

What, then, should one properly grant to strangers? The generalized respect and good will which one should grant to a human being in the name of the potential value he represents A rational man does not forget that *life* is the source of all values and, as such, a common bond among living beings This does not mean that he regards human lives as interchangeable with his own. . . . the value he grants to others is only a consequence, an extension, a secondary projection of the primary value which is himself. “The respect and good will that men of self-esteem feel toward other

human beings is profoundly egoistic; they feel, in effect: ‘Other men are of value because they are of the same species as myself.’ In revering living entities, they are revering their *own* life. This is the psychological base of any emotion of sympathy and any feeling of ‘species solidarity.’”⁸⁷

According to this argument, one respects others because they embody that which one is committed to respecting in oneself. (Here the Aristotelian and Kantian strands coalesce.) But this argument is never developed further.

Another interesting but undeveloped idea is that dealing with others through coercion is less rational than dealing with others through persuasion because the persuader deals with others through reason:

Do you ask what moral obligation I owe to my fellow men? None—except the obligation I owe to myself, to material objects and to all of existence: rationality. I deal with men as my nature and theirs demands: by means of reason. I seek or desire nothing from them except such relations as they care to enter of their own voluntary choice. It is only with their mind that I can deal . . . I win by means of nothing but logic . . .⁸⁸

But this argument, in order to work, would have to appeal to a substantive rather than a merely procedural notion of practical rationality; rationality would have to be a constraint, not just on the choice of means to a predetermined end but also on the content of the end itself.⁸⁹ Yet, in trying to defend the idea, Rand ends up reverting to instrumental, strategic considerations:

To deal with men by force is as impractical as to deal with nature by persuasion.⁹⁰

The men who attempt to survive, not by means of reason, but by means of force, are attempting to survive by the method of animals. But just as animals would not be able to survive by attempting the method of plants, by rejecting locomotion and waiting for the soil to feed them—so men cannot survive by attempting the method of animals, by rejecting reason and counting on productive men to serve as their prey. Such looters may achieve their goals for the range of a moment, at the price of destruction: the destruction of their victims and their own.⁹¹

The idea that injustice is wrong simply because the parasite will eventually run out of victims and cannot count on others’ being willing to serve as prey is pure

Hobbes:

The Foole hath sayd in his heart, there is no such thing as Justice; and sometimes also with his tongue, seriously alleaging, that every mans conservation, and contentment, being committed to his own care, there could be no reason, why every man might not do what he thought conduced thereunto: and therefore also to make, or not make; keep, or not keep Covenants, was not against Reason, when it conduced to ones benefit. . . . This specious reasoning is neverthesse false. . . . there is no man can hope by his own strength, or wit, to defend himself from destruction, without the help of Confederates; where every one expects the same defence by the Confederation, that any one else does: and therefore he which declares he thinks it reason to deceive those that help him, can in reason expect no other means of safety, than what can be had from his own single Power. He therefore that breaketh his Covenant, and consequently declareth that he thinks he may with reason do so, cannot be received into any Society, that unite themselves for Peace and Defence, but by the error of them that receive him; nor when he is received, be retayned in it, without seeing the danger of their error; which errors a man cannot reasonably reckon upon as the means of his security⁹²

My objections here are the same as those to Peikoff's gold-mine story.

There are two problems, I think, with the Hobbesian approach. First, it seems unlikely that any strategic case for justice will be so strong as to rule out the exceptions Rand wants to. Rule egoism suffers from the same difficulties as rule utilitarianism; in cases where one's end can be better promoted by violating the rule (for example, when one can stay alive only by killing and eating one's companions in the lifeboat), the fact that in general the rule promotes one's welfare is no reason to abide by it blindly.

Many readers of Rand, noticing that she allows us to make exceptions in emergencies, have assumed that she thinks that the ban on initiating force is lifted in emergencies. But in fact, curiously enough, what Rand seems to be saying in "The Ethics of Emergencies" is that it is the ban on altruism that is lifted.

It is on the ground of that generalized good will and respect for the value of human life that one helps strangers in an emergency—and *only in an emergency*. It is important to differentiate between the rules of conduct in an emergency situation and the rules of conduct in the normal conditions of human existence. . . . It is only in emergency situations that one should volunteer to help strangers, if it is

in one's power. For instance, a man who values human life and is caught in a shipwreck, should help to save his fellow passengers. . . . But this does not mean that after they all reach shore, he should devote his efforts to saving his fellow passengers from poverty, ignorance, neurosis or whatever other troubles they may have. . . . The principle that one should help men in an emergency cannot be extended to regard all human suffering as an emergency and to turn the misfortune of some into a first mortgage on the lives of others.⁹³

The idea seems to be that ordinarily, you should not help others to survive, since that is something they are supposed to do on their own. In exceptional cases, however, where people are temporarily unable to help themselves, it is permissible to help them; and they are not parasites for depending temporarily on your help. Rand says nothing about whether in emergencies it is permissible to sacrifice others to oneself. I do find it difficult, though, to imagine Howard Roark in *The Fountainhead*, or Dagny Taggart in *Atlas Shrugged*, bashing some innocent person over the head in order to survive in a lifeboat situation. (I can, perhaps, imagine Kira Argounova doing this in *We the Living*.) Rand clearly does not want the prohibition on initiatory coercion to collapse into a mere rule of thumb, to be thrown out the window as circumstances require; yet, in order to avoid this result, she is forced by her reliance on the Hobbesian approach to make the implausible claim that acts of injustice can never further one's bare survival.

But there is a more serious objection to the Hobbesian approach. Even if it could be shown that coercion inevitably worsened one's chances of bare survival, that consideration is surely not the primary reason for avoiding coercion. Such a view conjures up the unsavory outlook defended by some Greek Sophists⁹⁴ and contrasted by Plato with his own proto-Aristotelian vision of justice as an intrinsic component of human flourishing:

Among all of you who claim to praise righteousness, from the original heroes of old whose words survive, down to the men of the present day, not one has ever blamed wrongfulness or praised righteousness except in terms of the reputations, honours, and rewards that come about on the basis of these. But what each in itself does by its own power, in virtue of being present in the soul of its possessor, even if it escapes the notice of gods and men—no one, whether in poetry or in private conversations, has ever adequately set out the argument that the one is the greatest of evils that a soul can have in it, while righteousness is the greatest good. . . . But set reputations aside, as Glaucon has insisted; for otherwise . . . we will say that you are not praising what is right, but what seems so, nor censuring what is wrong, but what seems so, and advocating secret

wrongdoing. . . . If indeed, then, you agree that righteousness is one of the greatest goods—those that are worth acquiring for the sake of their results, but much more so for themselves, like seeing, hearing, thinking, and being healthy, and whatever other goods are fruitful in virtue of their own nature and not their reputation—then praise this very feature of righteousness, that on account of its very self it benefits its possessor, and wrongfulness harms him.⁹⁵

IX. The Aristotelian Alternative

For Aristotle, a human being is essentially a *logikon* animal and a *politikon* animal. *Logikon* and *politikon* are usually translated as “rational” and “political,” respectively; and, for most purposes, those are the best translations. But they do not fully capture the close links Aristotle sees between *logos* and *politikê*. The core meaning of *logos* is speech or language or anything spoken (a word, phrase, sentence, conversation, story, explanation, account, definition, or argument). By extension, it has two derivative meanings: a) that which is expressed or explained in speech, which is to say, the intelligible nature of something (or, more narrowly, a ratio or proportion); and b) the capacity or faculty of speech, that is, reason. But even when *logos* does mean “reason,” it still retains a strong connotation of “language” and “discourse,” and thus a social dimension that the English word lacks. To be a rational animal is to be a language-using animal, a conversing animal, a discursive animal. And to live a human life is thus to live a life centered around discourse.

Our nature as *logikon* is thus closely allied to our nature as *politikon*. To be a *politikon* animal is not simply to be an animal that lives in groups or sets up governments; it is to cooperate with others on the basis of discourse about shared ends.

Now that man is more of a *politikon* animal than the bee and every other gregarious animal is clear. For nature, as we say, makes nothing in vain, and among the animals only man has *logos*. So while [mere] voice is an indication of pain or pleasure, and hence is found in other animals (for their nature reaches as far as this: having the perception of pain and pleasure, and indicating these to one another), *logos* is for revealing the advantageous and the disadvantageous, and so also the right and the wrong. For this is peculiar to man, as opposed to the other animals: to be the sole possessor of the perception of good and evil, of right and wrong, and the others. And a community of these makes a household and a *polis*.⁹⁶

Being *politikon* is for Aristotle an expression of being *logikon*; just as *logikon* animals naturally conduct their private affairs through reason rather than through

unreflective passion, so they naturally conduct their common affairs through public discourse and rational persuasion, rather than through violence—unlike the non-Greek barbarians, whose (alleged) inability to conduct either their private or their common affairs through *logos* makes them natural slaves.

A truly human life, then, will be a life characterized by reason and intelligent cooperation. (Bees may cooperate after a fashion, but not on the basis of discourse about shared ends.) To a *logikon* animal, reason has value not only as an instrumental means to other goals but as an intrinsic and constitutive part of a fully human life; and the same holds true for cooperation. The *logikon* animal, insofar as it genuinely expresses *logos*, will not deal on cooperative terms with others merely because doing so makes others more likely to contribute instrumentally to the agent's good; rather, the agent will see a life of cooperation with others as an essential part of his own good.

For the complete good seems to be self-sufficient. But by the self-sufficient we mean not what is so for one alone by himself, living a solitary life, but what is so also for parents and offspring and wife, and in general for friends and the members of one's *polis*—since man is a naturally *politikon* animal.⁹⁷

And from this it is apparent that a *polis*, insofar as it is truly so named and not merely for the sake of words, must diligently concern itself with excellence; for otherwise the community becomes a mere alliance of aliens, differing only in location from the alliances of those who live far apart; and law is a mere agreement, just as Lycophron the sophist says, “a surety to one another of right,” but not such as to make the *polis*-members good and righteous. . . . It is apparent, then, that a *polis* is not the sharing of location, for the sake also of not wronging one another and of trade. Rather, these things must necessarily be present if a *polis* is to exist; yet a *polis* is still not the presence of all of these, but is the community of both households and families for the sake of a complete and self-sufficing life.⁹⁸

Thus Hobbes's reply to the Foole is not the whole story. To the extent that we are *logikon* animals, participation in a human community, together with a shared pursuit of the human good, is a constitutive part of a truly human life.⁹⁹

Human life comes in degrees, and a life is more human to the extent that it is characterized by rationality and intelligent cooperation, and less human to the extent that it is characterized instead by blind emotion and violent predation. Both the cooperative and the predatory person may use reason instrumentally to advance their ends, but only for the former is reason also constitutive of his relations with others. Hence if one chooses to subordinate others forcibly to one's own ends rather than deal

with them through rational persuasion, one chooses violent predation over intelligent cooperation in that particular instance—and ipso facto chooses a life that is less human overall than it would have been if one had made the opposite choice. To violate the rights of others, then, is to lessen one's own humanity.

Yet it would, like as not, seem highly absurd to those willing to reflect, if this should be the task of the *politikos*: to be attending to how he can rule and despotise over his neighbours, both those who are willing and those who are not willing. For how can that be *politikon*, or appropriate to a lawgiver, which at any rate is not even lawful? Now to rule not only rightly but wrongly is unlawful, and to dominate is not also to do so rightly. Nor yet do we see this in the other sciences; for it is not the task of a healer, nor of a steersman, to either persuade or coerce, the one his patients and the other his passengers [but only to persuade them]. But most people seem to think despotic art is *politikê*. And precisely what they each will say is neither right nor advantageous with regard to themselves, this they are not ashamed to practise toward others; for they seek rightful rule for themselves, but toward others they have no concern for the things that are right.¹⁰⁰

Those who wish to live a *logikon* life are committed to dealing with other *logikon* people as conversation partners rather than as slaves, cattle, or dupes.

But why should we wish to live a *logikon* life? Because each human being is to be identified primarily with his *logos*; hence his life expresses his essential nature as a human being (and thus is in his self-interest) insofar as it exemplifies *logos*:

Now this [intellect] would even seem to be each man, since it is his controlling and better part. It would be absurd, then, if he were to choose not his own life but that of something else. And what was said before will fit in now too; for that which is each thing's own is by nature supreme and most pleasant for each thing. And for man, then, the life according to intellect is so, since this most of all is the man.¹⁰¹

Well-being, then, appears to be something complete and self-sufficient, being the end of actions. . . . For just as for a flute-player and a sculptor and every artist, and in general for things having a task and action, the good and the well seem to lie in the task, so it would seem also for man . . . the task of man is a certain life, and this an activity and actions of soul with *logos*. And that of an upright man is these same things done well and finely; and each thing is accom-

plished well when it is done in accordance with its own excellence.¹⁰²

A human lives a fully human life, and thus lives a life that is truly his own, only to the extent that it intrinsically expresses the *logos* that he essentially is.

Of course, a person may not be faced with the choice between a short life full of good and a long life full of evil. Suppose that by engaging in violent predation for a short period now, I can escape destruction and so survive to live a much more rational and cooperative life in the future. Why doesn't the later, longer period of maximally human life (made possible by my less human behavior now) make up for, and so justify, my current actions? The answer, I suspect, is that the humanity of a life is determined not simply by the bulk amount of fully human aspects in it but also by their proportions and causal connections to one another and to the less human aspects. The same activities may count as more or less human depending upon whether they were achieved at an inhuman cost. Hence, among the possible lives available to one at any given moment, the ones that involve acting inhumanly at that moment will always be less human than those that do not.¹⁰³

To trample on the rights of others is never in our self-interest, because well-being cannot "come about for those who rob and use force." One cannot do evil that good may come, because the result counts as good only if it is achieved in the right way. The binding force of rights presumably derives from this source.

X. Flourishing Justified; or, In Praise of Whim-Worship

I believe the Aristotelian approach to the relation between justice and self-interest is clearly more appealing than the Hobbesian approach. But what grounds do we have for believing it? That is, why should we believe that it is our flourishing rather than our bare survival that serves as our natural end and so constitutes our self-interest?

We have seen that on the Randian approach, beliefs are justified only when they have been traced back to their experiential foundations in sense-perception, and sense-perception alone. As noted, when one tries to restrict oneself to that foundation, it is easier to derive an instrumental model of practical reason than a substantive one. Hence it is Rand's epistemological commitments that stand between her and a justification of flourishing survival. But on an Aristotelian conception of rationality, one may legitimately take the fact that a goal of flourishing coheres better than a goal of bare survival with our other moral beliefs as a sufficient (though defeasible) justification for believing that flourishing rather than bare survival is our natural end. That is not a form of argument Rand could consciously accept (though she seems to have accepted it subconsciously). Like Mackie, she would no doubt object strenuously to the idea of using premises about value to derive conclusions about human nature. But

for the Aristotelian, once again, the growth of knowledge is not a matter of rigid hierarchies but of networks of mutual adjustment, and no privileged class of beliefs holds absolute veto power over beliefs of another class. Hence, we are justified in taking the greater moral appeal of flourishing survival as a reason for accepting it.¹⁰⁴

To the Objectivist, this argument runs afoul of the Randian prohibition on using emotions as tools of cognition. When searching for truth, we may find a proposition appealing, but our liking it is not admissible evidence for it:

Emotions are the automatic results of man's value judgments integrated by his subconscious Man's emotional mechanism is like an electronic computer, which his mind has to program—and the programming consists of the values his mind chooses. . . . Emotions are produced by man's premises, held consciously or subconsciously, explicitly or implicitly. . . . To take “whatever makes one happy” as a guide to action means: to be guided by nothing but one's emotional whims. Emotions are not tools of cognition; to be guided by whims—by desires whose source, nature and meaning one does not know—is to turn oneself into a blind robot When a “desire,” regardless of its nature or cause, is taken as an ethical primary then one man's desire to produce and another man's desire to rob him have equal ethical validity. . . .¹⁰⁵

To be guided by one's emotional reactions in deciding what to believe and how to act is, in Rand's official terminology, to become a “whim-worshiper.”

Note that Rand's objection to treating emotions as tools of cognition is not that emotions are intrinsically noncognitive; on the contrary, she agrees with Aristotle (and a number of other Greek thinkers) in taking emotions to embody normative judgments. Her objection is that relying on emotions is impermissible unless we have first validated the judgments they embody by tracing them back to their foundations—presumably in sense-perception. For the negative coherentist, on the contrary, we are justified in taking things to be as they seem to us—where this includes accepting as true the normative judgments implicit in our desires and emotions—unless these judgments can be shown to conflict with other data available to us. Aristotelianism, then, is to this extent a cult of whim-worship!

Rand's prohibition on using emotions as tools of cognition puts her own philosophy in a rather ironic position. Most of Rand's admirers have come to agree with all or part of her ideas not initially by reading *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology* and the like but by reading *Atlas Shrugged* or *The Fountainhead*. What draws them to her vision of the world is generally not the foundationalist arguments in her non-fiction but the inspiring vision portrayed in her novels—and not the long speeches in her novels, either, which many readers find tedious and either skim or skip,¹⁰⁶ but the vivid and emotionally engaging presentation of the main characters'

moral personalities, attitudes, and actions.

Rand herself recognizes that this is the case. Indeed, she holds that: “*Art is the indispensable medium for the communication of a moral ideal.*”¹⁰⁷ Yet, by the official Objectivist theory, it seems that someone who comes to share Rand’s moral ideal solely because of the response provoked by her art—someone who has no particular interest in going on to her nonfiction to learn the arcane details of axiomatic concepts and measurement-omission—is guilty of serious irrationality. And presumably the same charge applies even to those who do go on to the arcane details but who nevertheless act on their new moral ideal before they have mastered the entire Objectivist system. If you act on the moral ideal recommended by your emotions before having fully traced, dissected, and proven the judgments embodied in those emotions, are you not treating emotions as tools of cognition?

As David Kelley points out, much of the attraction of Rand’s moral vision is its apparent ability to incorporate many of the conflicting attitudes inherent in conventional morality and to reconcile them into a consistent system:

The conventional ethos . . . is made up of three identifiable strands—the aristocratic, the religious, and the bourgeois—Achilles, Jesus, and Ben Franklin. . . . Despite the contradictions among these strands, they all contribute to the normal reader’s sense of how one should behave, what values one should live for, what sort of person is valuable. [Rand’s work] speaks to every aspect of this ethos, and provides a comprehensive and internally consistent alternative to it. . . . She employs many of the symbols, and endorses many of the virtues, associated with the strands I’ve described. But she gives all of these a radically new meaning, a new place in her vision of the meaning of life and the heroic potential of human nature. . . . This new moral sense embraces all that is good in conventional morality. It incorporates all that is admirable in the aristocratic ethos—strength, courage, pride, self-discipline—but it holds that the proper function of these virtues is the conquest of nature, not the conquest of men. It incorporates all that is appealing in the religious ethos: kindness and mutual respect; disdain for the snob and the status-seeker; a vision of the brotherhood that is possible among men. But it holds that these things *are* possible only to men of self-respect and independence. And finally, of course, Rand accepts those virtues of the producer that the bourgeois ethos recognized, but she gives us a much deeper, fuller, and more inspiring appreciation of the moral significance of the act of production.¹⁰⁸

In the Early Dialogues of Plato, Socrates is fond of pointing out that the conclusions toward which his students are being driven are not being imposed on

them by Socrates from the outside; rather, Socrates is eliciting them from the students as the previously unrecognized implications of their own views. Likewise, Rand's writing (both fiction and nonfiction) gains much of its impact from the fact that, despite her occasional claims to be challenging all of Western thought for the last two thousand years, she appeals to beliefs readers already possess. In my view, Kelley's quote correctly (if unintentionally) identifies the dialectical method as the key to much of Rand's persuasive power: exposing and eliminating contradictions among the moral *endoxa*, and then incorporating the surviving *endoxa* into a unified explanatory system. "Resolving the difficulties and saving the appearances," Aristotle calls it.

Such is Aristotelian theory and Randian practice. But such is not Randian theory. That Rand's moral vision incorporates and reconciles crucial elements of the conflicting strands of conventional morality cannot, on Rand's view (though it could on Aristotle's view), count as a reason for accepting her moral vision. Since Rand believes conventional morality is not justified, and those who hold it have based their evaluations on inappropriate foundations, saving the appearances of conventional morality is not a mark in favor of a moral theory in her eyes. Those who have been attracted to the Objectivist camp for such reasons are, once again, guilty of irrationality. Hence the irony of Rand's position: What has been for so many the main doorway into Objectivism is a doorway that Objectivism's founder herself sought to bar.

[Precursors of certain portions of this essay were presented at the 1993 Institute for Objectivist Studies Summer Seminar on Human Nature and Values at Roger Williams College, and at the 1994 Institute for Objectivist Studies Summer Seminar on Rationality at Oberlin College. I am grateful to audiences at both seminars for searching questions and stimulating discussion. The essay has also benefited from written comments and queries by Roger Donway, David Kelley, and William Thomas. I would particularly like to express my appreciation for the efforts that David Kelley and The Objectivist Center are making to free the discussion of Ayn Rand's philosophy from the dogmatism and rigidity that have so often stifled dialogue in the past.]

Notes

1. Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* (New York: New American Library—Dutton, 1992; 35th anniversary edition), pp. 1064, 1073.
2. Dante *La divina commedia* IV.130–32. “Poi ch’ innalzai un poco più le ciglia, vidi ‘l maestro di color che sanno seder tra filosofica famiglia.” “When I raised my eyes a little higher, I saw the master of them that know sitting amid a philosophic family.” Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. John D. Sinclair (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939).
3. Since both Aristotle and Rand regard value-claims as a type of fact-claims, the distinction between theoretical and practical reason can be a difficult one to draw. But I think we can avoid begging too many philosophical questions if we define practical reasoning as reasoning whose conclusion is a decision about what to do, and then define theoretical reasoning as reasoning that is not practical. (This allows, of course, for the possibility that a chain of practical reasoning may have shorter chains of theoretical reasoning embedded within it.)
4. It may be worth noting that for Aristotle the mean is not simply some sort of average between the extremes; that would be what Aristotle calls the arithmetic mean, and rejects. (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1106a25–1107a27) Rather, Aristotle’s doctrine of the mean, and indeed his whole approach to philosophy, represents a *dialectical* orientation, in Sciabarra’s sense of that term: “A thinker who employs a dialectical method embraces neither a pole nor the middle of a duality of extremes. . . . He or she presents an integrated alternative that examines the premises at the base of an opposition as a means to its transcendence. [The dialectical thinker] does not literally *construct* a synthesis out of the debris of false alternatives [but rather] aims to *transcend* the limitations that . . . traditional dichotomies embody.” Chris M. Sciabarra, *Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), pp. 16–17.
5. David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge and P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), I.3.8.
6. David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding; and A Letter from a Gentleman to His Friend in Edinburgh*, ed. Eric Steinberg (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1977), XII.
7. David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature* I.3.7–8.
8. Hume *Treatise* II.3.3.
9. Hume *Treatise* I.4.3.
10. Hume *Treatise* I.4.7.
11. David Hume, *Letter from a Gentleman* II, VI.
12. Hume *Enquiry* V. What secures this reliable correlation between natural inclination and the facts? Hume’s talk of “pre-established harmony,” “final causes,” and the “wisdom of nature” might lead us to expect an explanation appealing to some sort of benevolent providence. In fact, Hume believes (eighty years before Darwin) that the organs and capacities of living organisms are the product of natural selection acting on a process of random mutations to filter out the unfit. So, presumably, our natural inclinations are reliable because organisms with reliable inclinations were selected, while those with unreliable inclinations perished.

“Is there a system, an order, an oeconomy of things, by which matter can preserve that

perpetual agitation, which seems essential to it, and yet maintain a constancy in the forms, which it produces? There certainly is such an oeconomy: For this is actually the case with the present world. The continual motion of matter, therefore, in less than infinite transpositions, must produce this oeconomy or order; and by its very nature, that order, when once established, supports itself, for many ages, if not to eternity. But wherever matter is so poised, arranged, and adjusted as to continue in perpetual motion, and yet preserve a constancy in the forms, its situation must, of necessity, have all the appearance of art and contrivance which we observe at present. . . . It is in vain, therefore, to insist upon the uses of the parts in animals or vegetables, and their curious adjustment to each other. I would fain know how an animal could subsist, unless its parts were so adjusted? Do we not find, that it immediately perishes whenever this adjustment ceases, and that its matter corrupting tries some new form? It happens, indeed, that the parts of the world are so well adjusted, that some regular form immediately lays claim to this corrupted matter: And if it were not so, could the world subsist? Must it not dissolve as well as the animal, and pass through new positions and situations; till in a great, but finite succession, it fall at last into the present or some such order?" David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion; and the Posthumous Essays Of the Immortality of the Soul and Of Suicide*, ed. Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980), VIII.

13. I follow the common (though by no means universal) consensus among Plato scholars that assigns the *Laches*, *Lysis*, *Charmides*, *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, *Protagoras*, and *Gorgias* to an early period; the *Meno*, *Cratylus*, *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, *Republic*, and perhaps *Timaeus* to a middle period; and the *Phaedrus*, *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Philebus*, and *Laws* to a late period. For further discussion, see the articles and bibliography in Richard Kraut, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). All translations from Plato and Aristotle are mine.
14. Plato *Phaedo* 100a.
15. Plato *Cratylus* 436c–e.
16. Plato *Republic* 511b, 533c–d.
17. Plato *Seventh Letter* 344b.
18. I take *Symposium* 204c–206a as evidence that the Form of the Good and the Form of the Beautiful are meant to be one and the same thing.
19. Plato *Republic* 508b–509b.
20. Plato *Republic* 517c.
21. Plato *Symposium* 210e–212a.
22. Plato *Meno* 80d–e.
23. "When people are questioned—assuming someone asks the questions in the appropriate way—they state everything as it is. And yet they would not be able to do this unless the knowledge and the correct account happened to be innate within them. Accordingly, if one leads them to diagrams or anything else of that kind, that's what will prove most clearly that this is so." Plato *Phaedo* 73a–b.

"Is there any belief he has given in answering that was not his own? No, they were his own. And yet he did not have knowledge, in any case. . . . So the one who does not know has within himself true beliefs concerning these things he does not know. . . . And if someone were to ask him these things many times in many ways, you know that in the end his knowledge about these things would be no less accurate than anyone's. . . . So will he not have knowledge without having been taught—but rather questioned, calling up the knowledge by himself from within himself? . . . And to call up knowledge by oneself from within

oneself—is that not recollection?” Plato *Meno* 85b–d.

24. Plato *Phaedo* 73c–75e.
25. Plato *Meno* 81c–d.
26. Plato *Republic* 518b–d.
27. The distinction among subjective, intrinsic, and objective approaches is standard in Objectivist literature. For an explication of this distinction as it relates to theoretical rationality, see Leonard Peikoff, *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* (New York: New American Library—Dutton, 1991), pp. 142–151; for the same distinction as it relates to practical rationality, see pp. 241–249.
28. Leonard Peikoff, “Aristotle’s ‘Intuitive Induction,’” *New Scholasticism*, Spring 1985, pp. 187–88.
29. Aristotle *Prior Analytics* 46a17–27.
30. Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1145b2–7.
31. Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* 90a15–27, 93a16–b7.
32. Aristotle *Posterior Analytics* 71b20–72a8.
33. Aristotle *Topics* 100a25–101b4.
34. The translations “postulate” and “posit” are standard here, but it is important to keep in mind that Aristotle’s notion has none of the connotations of arbitrariness that the English words might suggest.
35. Aristotle *Posterior Analytics* 72a15–18.
36. On the issue of axioms, Aristotle and Rand are essentially in agreement; see Ayn Rand, *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology: Expanded Second Edition*, ed. Harry Binswanger and Leonard Peikoff (New York: Meridian, 1990), p. 55. With regard to postulates as statements of essence, it is less clear to what extent Rand and Aristotle agree. As Rand notes, essences are metaphysical for Aristotle but epistemological for Rand. (Rand, *Objectivist Epistemology*, p. 52) But Rand takes Aristotle’s view to mean that these metaphysical essences are embodied universals, like Platonic Forms but somehow embedded in matter. (Rand, *Objectivist Epistemology*, pp. 2, 53, 137–141, 307; cf. Peikoff, “Aristotle’s ‘Intuitive Induction,’” pp. 189–190) I think this interpretation is mistaken and that an Aristotelian essence is closer to what Rand means by an identity. For example, in *Metaphysics* VII.6, Aristotle tells us that primary substances are identical with their essences. Certainly, Rand agrees with Aristotle that *identity* is metaphysical, not epistemological, and that reference to a thing’s identity is what is fundamental in causal explanation.
37. In contemporary philosophical terminology, “doxastic” (from Greek *doxa*, belief) is the standard adjectival form of “belief.”
38. Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1095a30–b7.
39. Aristotle is not consistent in his use of the term *epistêmê*. Sometimes it is used expansively, to cover our understanding both of the first principles and of the propositions deduced from them. At other times, the term for our understanding of the first principles is *nous* (“intellection”—often translated, to my mind very misleadingly, as “intuition”), while the term *epistêmê* is reserved for our understanding of the deduced propositions (what I’ve been calling demonstrative *epistêmê*), as in the following passage: “Clearly, then, it must be by induction that we know [*gnôrizēin*] the first [principles]; for in this way too, sense-perception implants the universal. Now since, among the intellectual dispositions wherein we grasp the truth, some are always true, while others admit of falsity (e.g., belief and reasoning [admit of falsity] while *epistêmê* and *nous* are always true), and there is no sort [of intellectual dispo-

sition] more accurate than *epistêmê*, except for *nous*, and first principles are better known than demonstrations, and all *epistêmê* involves a reasoned account, [therefore] there cannot be *epistêmê* of first principles. And since there can be nothing truer than *epistêmê*, except for *nous*, there must be *nous* [rather than *epistêmê*] of the first principles. . . . The starting-point of demonstration is not demonstration; in the same way, that of *epistêmê* is not *epistêmê*.” (*Posterior Analytics* 100b3–13; cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1140b30–1141a9)

Elsewhere in the *Posterior Analytics*, however, Aristotle employs the more expansive sense, applying the term *epistêmê* to the non-demonstrative grasp of first principles as well as to the demonstrative grasp of their implications. “Now we say that not all *epistêmê* is demonstrative; rather, *epistêmê* of immediate premises is non-demonstrative. And the necessity of this is evident: for if it is necessary to have *epistêmê* of the things that are prior and that ground the demonstration, and at some point the regress stops with immediate premises, these must be indemonstrable.” (*Posterior Analytics* 72b19–23)

Likewise, in the *Metaphysics* (982a1–30, 983a24–30, 1005a19–b12) he clearly regards first principles as among the objects of *epistêmê*. As far as I can see, this inconsistency is purely terminological and not substantive; the issue is whether our understanding of the first principles of explanation should be called by the same term as our understanding of the items explained in terms of those principles, or whether a different word (*nous*) would be more appropriate. When, as at *Post. An.* 100b3–13, Aristotle does speak of *nous* in contrast with *epistêmê*, we should not infer that *nous* is some kind of special intuitive means of grasping propositions. Rather, just as *epistêmê* is not a means to understanding the explananda, but is rather the state we are in when we understand them, so *nous* is not a means of understanding first principles, but is rather the state we are in when we understand them. Here I am largely in agreement with Barnes’ illuminating commentary on the passage (Jonathan Barnes, *Aristotle’s Posterior Analytics* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975], pp. 256–57).

40. Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1139b25–31.
41. I borrow this term from John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1971)—although since anyone who actually achieved a complete reflective equilibrium would have to be omniscient or cognitively dead, it might be better to speak of reflective equilibration (just as Austrian economists speak of equilibrating processes while denying the existence of equilibrium).
42. Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1145b2–6; the “all or most or most authoritative” triad here parallels Aristotle’s usual “everyone or most people or the wisest” triad.
43. Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1145b6–7; cf. *Physics* 211a7–11.
44. Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1153b27–28, 1172b36–1173a1.
45. Aristotle *Posterior Analytics* 71b33–72a6, *Physics* 184a16–25, *On the Soul* 413a11–12, *Metaphysics* 1029b3–12, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1095a30–b6, *Eudemian Ethics* 1216b26–35.
46. This is the definition of foundationalism for justification. To obtain the analogous definition of foundationalism for explanation, substitute “constitute scientific understanding” for “are epistemically justified,” and “explanatorily basic” for “self-justifying.”
47. David O. Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 291.
48. Alvin Plantinga, “Coherentism and the Evidentialist Objection to Belief in God,” in Robert Audi and William J. Wainwright, eds., *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment: New Essays in the Philosophy of Religion* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 136–37.

49. Those who wish to resist the inference from seemings to beliefs may content themselves by regarding my epistemological theory as a matter of coherence among seemings rather than among beliefs.
50. J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983) p. 113. Mackie backs up this argument by offering examples of normative-to-positive arguments that are indeed pretty silly. But one can always come up with silly arguments, of any form. The question is whether, in any clash between normative and positive judgments, the normative must always give way. It is not obvious to me that it must; it depends on the relative weight of the judgments in question.
51. Aristotle *Metaphysics* 1029b3–12.
52. Aristotle *Sophistical Refutations* 183b18–22, *Metaphysics* 993a10–b20.
53. Aristotle *Eudemian Ethics* 1216b26–35.
54. Aristotle *Politics* 1281a42–b10.
55. Hence Plato and Hume may not be as far apart as they seem. One of Rand's remarks may be relevant here: "Philosophically, the mystic is usually an exponent of the *intrinsic* (revealed) school of epistemology; the skeptic is usually an advocate of epistemological *subjectivism*. But, psychologically, the mystic is a subjectivist who uses intrinsicism as a means to claim the primacy of *his* consciousness. . . . The skeptic is a disillusioned intrinsicist who . . . failed to find automatic supernatural guidance. . . ." Rand, *Objectivist Epistemology*, p. 79.
56. Ayn Rand, "The Objectivist Ethics," in Ayn Rand and Nathaniel Branden, *The Virtue of Selfishness: A New Concept of Egoism* (New York: Penguin Books, 1964), p. 14.
57. For documentation, see Jack Wheeler, "Rand and Aristotle: A Comparison of Objectivist and Aristotelian Ethics," in *The Philosophic Thought of Ayn Rand*, ed. Douglas J. Den Uyl and Douglas B. Rasmussen (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), pp. 81–101.
58. Terminological refresher: *classical foundationalism* regards all foundational beliefs as indefeasible, while *neoclassical foundationalism* considers at least some to be defeasible; *narrow foundationalism* regards only a privileged subset of our beliefs as foundational, while *broad foundationalism* considers all, or nearly all, our beliefs to be foundational.
59. Here I must note a complication. The phrase "data of sense-perception" might refer either to perceptual awareness or to the immediate perceptual judgments we form in response to such awareness; for Rand distinguishes these, and on her view it is not perceptual judgment but perceptual awareness that is foundational. As David Kelley articulates the Objectivist position, perceptual awareness is infallible but is not propositional in form (David Kelley, *The Evidence of the Senses* [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986], pp. 197–207), whereas perceptual judgments, though propositional, are not infallible (Kelley, pp. 218–38). Strictly speaking, then, there is no cognitive item in Rand's theory that is both indefeasible and a belief (assuming beliefs must be propositional); and so my description of Rand's theory as an instance of classical foundationalism, placing indefeasible beliefs at the foundations of knowledge, might be misleading. But in fact the definition of classical foundationalism can be stretched to cover Rand if we interpret "belief" broadly enough, to cover nonpropositional as well as propositional awareness (or substitute "seeming" or "putative cognition" for "belief"). In any case, nothing in my critique depends on this complication.
60. Rand, "The Objectivist Ethics," p. 22.
61. Rand, *Objectivist Epistemology*, p. 295.
62. Peikoff, *Objectivism*, pp. 54, 130–33.
63. Rand, "The Objectivist Ethics," pp. 35–36.

64. To be precise, Rand believes that infants experience a brief period of pure sensations, which appear to be something like discrete sense-data not yet organized into unified perceptions of identifiable and enduring objects. (See, for example, Rand “The Objectivist Ethics,” pp. 19–20, and Rand, *Objectivist Epistemology*, p. 5.) I rather doubt that infants undergo any such period; but since Rand in any case makes perception, not sensation, the foundation of knowledge, for my purposes here it hardly matters (especially since Rand herself considers the existence and nature of this purely sensory stage to be a scientific issue, not a philosophical one; see Rand, *Objectivist Epistemology*, p. 136).
65. See Rand, “The Objectivist Ethics;” and Ayn Rand, “Causality versus Duty” in *Philosophy: Who Needs It?* ed. Leonard Peikoff (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1982), pp. 114–122, especially p. 118. In Kantian terminology, one might say that while Aristotle and Rand both base their ethical systems on hypothetical rather than categorical imperatives, Aristotle’s hypothetical imperatives are assertoric while Rand’s are problematic. (Problematic hypothetical imperative: *If* you seek this end, you must take the following steps. Assertoric hypothetical imperative: *Since* you seek this end, you must take the following steps. Categorical imperative: *Regardless* of what ends you may seek, you must take the following steps.)
66. This word is notoriously difficult to translate. Literally, it means something like “own-ification;” less unsightly attempts include “appropriation,” “identification,” and “familiarization.” The idea is that we start out with a natural inclination toward self-preservation, but rational reflection on this end leads us to realize that we are committed to extending to other people the same kind of concern we have for ourselves; thus other people become “own-ified” to us.
67. Of course, the argument is not authentically Kantian, because Kant—unlike, I would argue, Hobbes and Aristotle—was no egoist. But modern versions of the argument are almost always based on a way of thinking that is distinctively Kantian and pioneered by Kant.
68. Ayn Rand, “The Wreckage of the Consensus,” in Ayn Rand et al., *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* (New York: New American Library, 1967), p. 227; but contrast the more Hobbesian-instrumentalist account on p. 17: “If some men do not choose to think or to work, they can survive (temporarily) only by looting the goods produced by others—but those others had to produce them, or none would have survived. . . . the fact remains that reason is man’s means of survival and that men prosper or fail, survive or perish in proportion to the degree of their rationality.”
69. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, p. 1023.
70. “The *intrinsic* theory holds that the good is inherent in certain things or actions as such ... regardless of any benefit or injury they may cause to the actors and subjects involved. It is a theory that divorces the concept of ‘good’ from beneficiaries Fundamental to an objective theory of values is the question: Of value to whom and for what?” Ayn Rand, “What is Capitalism?” in *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*, pp. 21–22.
71. *Ibid.*
72. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, p. 1061.
73. Herbert Spencer, “The Great Political Superstition,” in *Man versus the State* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Liberty Press, 1981), p. 150.
74. Rand, “The Objectivist Ethics,” pp. 26–27.
75. Rand, “The Objectivist Ethics,” p. 16.
76. Rand, “The Objectivist Ethics,” pp. 27. Yet Rand seems not to hold consistently to this distinction; within the very same article she also claims that “An organism’s life is its

standard of value,” that “Productive work is the central *purpose* of a rational man’s life,” and that “one’s own happiness [is] one’s highest purpose.”

77. Peikoff seems to favor a Hobbesian, rule-egoist interpretation: “Man must be long-range. He must know the survival significance of every action he takes. . . . Man can retain and deal with so vast a quantity of data only by the method of unit-reduction. . . . He can achieve the long-range outlook he needs only by the use of concepts. If man is to sustain and to protect his life, he must *conceptualize* the requirements of human survival. . . . In other words, what generalizations identify—in condensed, retainable form—the effect on man’s life of different kinds of choices? . . . ‘Man’s life’ is not a separate or ‘higher’ ideal arbitrarily added to ‘life.’ It is merely the standard of life applied to man.” (Peikoff, *Objectivism*, pp. 217–19)
78. Leonard Peikoff, “My Thirty Years With Ayn Rand,” in Ayn Rand et al., *The Voice of Reason: Essays in Objectivist Thought* (New York: New American Library, 1989), p. 340.
79. Peikoff, *Objectivism*, pp. 270–71.
80. Peikoff writes: “reality is a unity; to depart from it at a single point, therefore, is to depart from it in principle and thus to play with a lighted fuse. . . . The man who wages war against reality is (by definition) defying all the rules of proper epistemology” (p. 271). Similarly, Nietzsche holds that reality is a unified whole, and so that in condemning any piece of reality we are committed to becoming haters of reality as such. Accordingly, he counsels *amor fati* (love of what is fated), an attitude of acceptance toward what is metaphysically necessary. (See, for example, *Twilight of the Idols* V. 6, VI. 8; *Ecce Homo* II. 10; *The Gay Science* IV. 340–41; *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* II. 20, III. 2.) Rand advocates a similar attitude; but she differs from Nietzsche in regarding human beings as agents possessing free will, and so, unlike Nietzsche, she does not extend this attitude of acceptance to human actions. (See Rand, “The Metaphysical versus the Manmade.”) But in any case the issue of whether we should accept reality does not seem to be quite the same thing as the issue of whether we should represent reality accurately to others.
81. Plato *Republic* 365c–d.
82. Peikoff, “My Thirty Years With Ayn Rand,” p. 339.
83. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, p. 1019.
84. Diogenes Laertius *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, V.1.20.
85. Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1169a17–26.
86. Ayn Rand, “The Ethics of Emergencies,” in *Virtue of Selfishness*, p. 50.
87. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
88. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, p. 1022.
89. The idea is this. Suppose my goal is to rob or coerce you. Then dealing with you by appealing to your reason would *not* be a rational course of action for me, so long as we are thinking of rationality in purely instrumental terms, as a matter of selecting the most efficient means to one’s ends. So if rationality is to involve the requirement of appealing to the reason of others, then it is a constraint on ends and not merely on means; the good life, considered as an end, is *inter alia* one in which reasoning pervades our social relationships.
90. Ayn Rand, “The Metaphysical versus the Man-Made,” in *Philosophy: Who Needs It?* p. 32.
91. Rand, “The Objectivist Ethics,” p. 25–26.
92. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C. B. Macpherson (London: Penguin, 1968), pp. 203–5; cf. Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).
93. Rand, “Ethics of Emergencies,” pp. 53–54.

94. “For they [the Sophists] say that to do wrong is indeed naturally good, and to be wronged, bad; but the badness of being wronged so far exceeds the goodness of doing wrong that whenever people wrong one another and are wronged, and get a taste of both, to those unable to escape it then seems profitable to decide to make an agreement with one another neither to do wrong nor to be wronged. . . . And this, then, is the origin and essence of righteousness, being a compromise between what is best (i.e., doing wrong without being brought to justice) and what is worst (i.e., being wronged without being able to avenge one’s honour). And the right, being the mean between these two, is valued not as a good but out of being so weak as to suffer punishment for one’s wrongdoing. But if one is powerful enough to achieve this [doing wrong without being wronged], and is truly a man, such a person would never make an agreement neither to do wrong nor to be wronged; for that would be crazy.” (Plato *Republic* 358e–359b)
95. Plato *Republic* 366d–367d.
96. Aristotle *Politics* 1253a7–18.
97. Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1097b7–11; cf. 1169b17–19.
98. Aristotle *Politics* 1280b6–35.
99. We may be uncomfortable with Aristotle’s suggestion that it is the function of laws to make people virtuous. But Aristotle does not have our distinction between state and society; consequently, he seems not to see the possibility of any mode of managing common affairs through cooperation and discourse about the good, beyond the rather crude instrument of governmental decree. We can agree with Aristotle in broad terms about what human community should be like, without thereby being committed to any particular view of the extent to which the sort of cooperation Aristotle favors must be realized through the apparatus of state coercion.
100. Aristotle *Politics* 1324b22–36.
101. Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1178a2–7.
102. Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1097b20–1098a14. “Those, then, who are greedy concerning these things [wealth, honours, and bodily pleasures] gratify their appetites and in general their passions and the *alagon* part of the soul. . . . Those who are self-lovers in this way, then, are rightly reproached. . . . For if someone were always conscientious that he himself, above all things, should perform right actions, or sound-minded actions, or any other actions in accordance with the excellences, and in general were always to seek the fine for himself, no one will call this man a self-lover or blame him. But such a man would seem to be more of a self-lover; at any rate he assigns to himself the finest and fullest goods, and gratifies the most controlling part of himself, and obeys this in all things. And just as a *polis* too, and every other systematic whole, seems to be most of all its most controlling part, so also does man; and the one who loves and gratifies this, then, is most of all a self-lover. . . . That this, then, is, or is most of all, the man himself—and that the decent man loves this most of all—is not unclear. Hence he would be most of all a self-lover, of another sort from the one subject to reproach, and differing from that as much as the life in accordance with *logos* differs from that in accordance with passion, and the desire for the fine from that for seeming advantage. . . . So the good man ought to be a self-lover, for in performing fine actions he will both profit himself and benefit others; but the wicked man ought not, for in following his base passions he will harm both himself and his neighbours. . . . For every intellect chooses what is best for itself, and the decent man obeys his intellect” (Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1168b19–1169a18).
103. “And yet perhaps someone might suppose, if these things are defined in this way, that being the supreme ruler is the highest good; for in this way he would have supreme power to do

the most and finest actions, so that one who is able to rule ought not to yield to a neighbour, but rather to seize power for himself, father also taking no account of children, nor children of father, nor in general friend of friend, taking no thought in regard to this. For the highest good is the most choiceworthy, and doing well is the highest good. This, most likely, they therefore say truly—if the most choiceworthy of things really can come about for those who rob and use force. But like as not it cannot come about, and this is assumed falsely. For it is no longer possible for a supreme ruler's actions to be fine when he does not differ from his subjects as much as man from wife or father from children or master from slaves [these being preconditions for the moral legitimacy and authority of a supreme ruler]; so that he who transgresses would in no respect make right, later on, the amount by which he has already deviated from excellence" (Aristotle *Politics* 1325a34–b7).

104. That is not to say that we should not search for an explanation of *why* this account is true, or try to discover what facts about human nature and the structure of teleological explanation make flourishing rather than bare survival a final cause for organisms like us. I think this is a worthy goal, and one that I am pursuing in my own research. But I don't think we *need* the explanation initially in order to be justified in accepting flourishing as our end. (Nor, I suspect, do non-philosophers need it at all. "For the 'that' is the starting-point; and if this is sufficiently apparent, there will be no need in addition for the 'because.'" I think there is a certain amount of philosophical knowledge that everyone needs in order to live a truly human life, but what exceeds that may non-culpably be left to the specialist. *That* flourishing is the proper end belongs, I suspect, to the first category, and *why* to the second.)
105. Rand, "The Objectivist Ethics," pp. 30–33.
106. I personally was not one of those tempted to skim or skip; but then, notice that I ended up pursuing a career as a philosopher.
107. Ayn Rand, *The Romantic Manifesto: A Philosophy of Literature*, rev. ed. (New York: New American Library—Signet, 1975), p. 21. (Italics in the original.)
108. David Kelley, "The Code of the Creator," in Stephen Cox and David Kelley, *The Fountainhead: A Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration* (Poughkeepsie, N.Y.: Institute for Objectivist Studies, 1993), pp. 31–42.

Commentary

Reason and Perception in Ayn Rand's Epistemology A Reply to Roderick Long

Fred D. Miller, Jr.

Roderick Long offers a rather surprising interpretation of Ayn Rand's Objectivist philosophy: "that Rand unfortunately adopts a Platonic rather than an Aristotelian conception of theoretical rationality; that this in turn leads her to adopt a Humean rather than an Aristotelian conception of practical rationality; and this leads her to adopt a Hobbesian rather than an Aristotelian conception of the relation between self-interest and morality . . ." (p. 5)¹ He argues further that the Aristotelian approach is superior to Rand's on each of these topics. Central to this critique is the allegation that Rand's conception of theoretical reason is "Platonic."

Professor Long's discussion provides ample food for thought on a wide range of topics. Especially illuminating and provocative are his comparisons of Rand's epistemology, ethics, and political theory with the views of other philosophers. In this commentary, however, I am concerned with two questions: Is Long correct in his interpretation of Rand's view of theoretical reason? Are Long's criticisms of her view justified? But it is first necessary to recapitulate and clarify Long's interpretive framework, which relies upon a complex set of distinctions.

Long's first distinction is between *theoretical* and *practical* reason, which is usually understood as the difference between reason leading to factual conclusions ("is" claims) and rationality leading to evaluative or prescriptive conclusions ("ought" claims). As Long concedes, it is hard to spell this out in terms which Rand or Aristotle would accept, since both of them "regard value-claims as a type of fact-claims." Long proposes, very roughly, that reasoning is *practical* if its "conclusion is a decision about what to do," and *theoretical* if it is not practical. (p. 56 n. 3) This is problematic, because it defines a faculty (namely, theoretical reason) which is—on Long's own interpretation—more fundamental in terms of a faculty (practical reason) which is less fundamental. Moreover, it disregards Rand's denial that the categories of "theoretical" and "practical" are mutually exclusive.² For the purpose of the present discussion, however, theoretical reason may be understood as the faculty by which one discovers the nature of reality and practical reason as the faculty by which one decides what to do, and the question whether these faculties can in some way overlap may be de-

ferred.³

Long's second distinction is between *substantive* and *procedural* conceptions of reason. On the substantive view, all knowledge is derived by reasoning from certain ultimate premises or first principles which can themselves be grasped by reason itself. On the procedural view, reason can only determine whether a conclusion follows from premises which are presumed to be true through some means other than reason. (p. 6) According to Long, Plato and Aristotle take the substantive view of reason, whereas Hume holds the procedural view.

Long also classifies different views of knowledge as justified true belief. (pp. 23–24) He distinguishes two views of justification—foundationalism and coherentism—and then more specific versions of these views. According to *foundationalism*, beliefs are epistemically justified if, and only if, they either belong to a set of foundational (or self-justifying) beliefs or can be derived from such a set by a finite and noncircular chain of reasoning. Long distinguishes different versions of foundationalism based on how one understands the set of foundational beliefs. *Classical* foundationalism holds that all foundational beliefs are indefeasible, whereas *neoclassical* foundationalism admits that some foundational beliefs are defeasible. By an “indefeasible” belief Long apparently means one that cannot be found to be unjustified through further investigation, and by “defeasible” that it can be. *Narrow* foundationalism admits “only a privileged subset of our beliefs” into the foundational set, whereas *broad* foundationalism permits “all, or nearly all” of our beliefs to count as foundational. In contrast to the foregoing, *coherentism* holds that “beliefs are epistemically justified as long as, and to the extent that, they cohere with one another.” He distinguishes two versions of this, based on how “cohere” is understood. According to *negative* coherentism, “beliefs cohere as long as they do not conflict with one another;” and according to *positive* coherentism, “beliefs cohere only if, in addition to not conflicting with one another, they positively support one another.”

Long apparently does not regard these various categories as mutually exclusive, since he remarks that “negative coherentism and neoclassical broad foundationalism are essentially equivalent.” (p. 24) By this he evidently means that any belief which is epistemically justified on the basis of either view is also justified on the other.

Long applies the foregoing distinctions to Ayn Rand's epistemology as follows: First, Rand—like Plato and Aristotle—has a substantive view of theoretical reason, according to which reason can apprehend the first principles of reason. (p. 29) But Aristotle is “a neoclassical broad foundationalist” concerning knowledge as justified belief, while “Rand, by contrast, is best described as a classical narrow foundationalist.” (p. 30) It is in this respect only that Long characterizes Rand as a “Platonist.” Plato, on Long's reading, is a rationalist who holds that reason can grasp the first principles of knowledge by “intellectual intuition,” independently of, and unimpeded by, the senses. (p.16) Rand is, in contrast, an empiricist for whom “the privileged and indefeasible foundations of knowledge are the data of sense-percep-

tion.” (p. 30) Thus Long’s characterization of Rand’s epistemology as “Platonic” is highly misleading. (Would it be illuminating to call her metaphysics “Marxist” as opposed to “Aristotelian” because she rejects the existence of immaterial substances like Aristotle’s unmoved mover?)

Long (pp. 30–31) offers the following evidence for his interpretation: Rand defines reason as “the faculty that identifies and integrates the material provided by man’s senses.”⁷⁴ This implies, says Long, that “it cannot be rational to deny or question the senses; accepting and building-up from the data of perception is what reason does, and to the extent that we refuse to do this we are abdicating our reason, not exercising it.” (p. 30) Rand says that when you talk about discovering the ultimate constituents of the universe, such as subatomic particles, “unless you bring it back to the perceptual level, it’s not knowledge.”⁷⁵ In explicating Rand, Leonard Peikoff states that “the facts of perception . . . form the basis of cognition. They are the self-evident and the incontestable, by reference to which we validate all later knowledge.” Peikoff explicitly compares human knowledge to a city of skyscrapers, with the higher stories resting on lower ones until one reaches the foundation. He also defines “reduction” as “the process of identifying in logical sequence the intermediate steps that relate a cognitive item to perceptual data. . . . Such retracing is a requirement of objectivity.”⁷⁶

These passages do show that Rand (as explicated by Peikoff) has, in some sense, a foundationalist view of theoretical reason. Long, however, takes them to entail “classical narrow foundationalism,” which he proceeds to criticize from the standpoint of his own neo-Aristotelian position (i.e., of negative coherentism or neo-classical broad foundationalism).

Before considering Long’s criticisms, it is necessary to provide some additional background, because his cursory description of Rand’s epistemology is incomplete and somewhat misleading. In the first place, he calls Rand a “classical narrow foundationalist,” on the grounds that “for her, the privileged and indefeasible foundations of knowledge are the data of sense-perception.” (p. 30) This sounds like a version of phenomenalism, according to which all knowledge must be reduced to infallible beliefs about sense data. On such a view my knowledge that, for example, there is a tomato now before me must be reduced to infallible beliefs of the form, “Something red and round is now appearing.” Long acknowledges a “complication” for his interpretation, which presupposes a foundational set of self-justifying beliefs (p. 60 n. 59): Namely, Rand could not agree to this presupposition. For in order to have a belief (e.g., that something is now red and round), she would maintain, one must have concepts (e.g., of “red” and “round” and “something”). But one cannot have concepts on the perceptual level, because “concepts are abstractions or universals, and everything that man perceives is particular, concrete.”⁷⁷ This, she suggests, gave rise to the traditional *problem of universals*—the problem of showing that the use of concepts is valid. To appreciate the seriousness of this “complication” for Long’s interpretation, we must consider how Rand distinguishes the perceptual level from the conceptual level. First it should be remarked that perception—like every other form of conscious-

ness—is an active process consisting of differentiation and integration. Perception is the epistemological base for man’s knowledge, because it is the faculty by which we are directly aware of objects and discriminate between them. “A percept is a group of sensations automatically retained and integrated by the brain of a living organism.”⁸ Rand seems to understand by “sensations” momentary episodes, for she denies that we can experience isolated sensations or retain them in our memory.⁹ At the perceptual level (and perhaps even at the level of sensation) human beings have implicit concepts and implicit propositional knowledge. “Implicit” means that even a young child can be aware of data which can later be integrated on the conceptual level. Rand illustrates this by means of what she regards as the most elementary concepts, i.e., ontological concepts.¹⁰ The “building-block” of knowledge is the concept of an “existent,” which “is implicit in every percept (to perceive a thing is to perceive that it exists).” According to Rand human beings move from the perceptual to the conceptual level through four stages:

- (1) One is merely aware of objects or things, at which stage one has the (implicit) concept “entity.”
- (2) One is aware of one object in distinction from the rest of its perceptual field, which represents the (implicit) concept “identity.” For example, a baby recognizes its baby bottle.
- (3) One grasps the similarities and differences among these objects, which represents the (implicit) concept “unit.” For example, the baby is able to distinguish its bottle from its rattle on the basis of its shape and contents. A unit is defined as “an existent regarded as a separate member of a group of two or more similar members.”¹¹ Units do not exist as such; they are existents standing in a certain relation to consciousness. However, the mind forms units by classifying things according to relations of similarity and difference which do exist independently of consciousness. Rand therefore describes the concept of “unit” as “a bridge between metaphysics and epistemology.”¹² Finally,
- (4) One forms a concept, which is defined as “a mental integration of two or more units which are isolated according to a specific characteristic(s) and united by a specific definition.”¹³ For example, a young child understands the word “bottle,” which is a perceptual concrete serving as a symbol for the concept (a mental entity).

Perception on Rand’s view serves as the basis for concept formation, but perception as such is pre-conceptual and cannot by itself yield beliefs. At the perceptual level one has only *implicit* concepts and beliefs, in the sense that one is aware of data which can be later integrated on the conceptual level. However, the process of concept-formation is fallible. It involves both abstraction (i.e., omitting certain features of reality from one’s mental focus) and integration (combining existents into new mental unities), and error may occur in either of these dimensions. David Kelley criticizes phenomenalism (which he calls “Cartesian empiricism”) for positing infallible

judgments about sense data as the foundation of knowledge. Following David Kelley¹⁴, Long suggests that for Rand, “perceptual awareness is infallible but is not propositional in form, . . . whereas perceptual judgments, though propositional, are not infallible.” (p. 60 n. 59) But even if Rand would not countenance indefeasible perceptual beliefs, Long proposes, she is committed to infallible non-propositional “seemings” or “putative cognitions,” so that it is still correct to speak of her as a neoclassical narrow foundationalist.

It is doubtful, however, that Rand’s epistemology could accommodate this proposal. For the “seemings” at issue must have a determinate content if other cognitive states are to be derivable from them in the way envisaged by foundationalism. But, as was seen, Rand makes a radical distinction between the perceptual and conceptual levels of awareness. Perception involves causal interactions between the perceiver’s brain and particular objects, and perception is “valid” in the sense that it is always of what exists. However, *what* exists must be grasped on the conceptual level. At the level of perception one has only *implicit* concepts, which can only be explicated on the conceptual level. Forming an explicit concept is not like taking a pre-existing rabbit out of a hat. For on the perceptual level there is only the potential for propositional beliefs: because propositions are formed out of concepts, perception as such involves propositions only in an implicit sense. The data of perception cannot speak for themselves; they require interpretation by means of concepts and propositions. Immanuel Kant once said, “Concepts without percepts are empty, but percepts without concepts are blind.” In contrast, according to Objectivism, concepts without percepts are empty, but percepts without concepts are mute. It is on the conceptual level that we articulate the contents of what we experience on the perceptual level, and this is a fallible process. Long’s view of Rand as a “classical” or “Platonic” empiricist requires that we collapse the distinction between the perceptual and conceptual levels of awareness. His interpretation would be more defensible if he were simply to withdraw the label “classical.”¹⁵ Long is, however, correct that Rand regards perception as the ultimate basis of all knowledge, in the sense that our concepts and beliefs are justified only if they can be traced back to the perceptual level.

Long’s brief summary omits some important points in Rand’s epistemology, two of which require some discussion. The first concerns Rand’s *contextualism*. David Kelley remarks that the traditional dispute between foundationalism and coherentism arose from a common unquestioned assumption that hierarchy and context are incompatible. “The chief goal of a theory of knowledge should be to integrate them.”¹⁶ If Kelley is correct, then Rand’s foundationalism is mitigated by her contextualism in a fundamental way, and it is unfortunate that Long does not explore this dimension of her thought.

Rand frequently emphasizes the role of context in her treatment of concept-formation and definition: “all conceptualization is a contextual process: the context is the entire field of a mind’s awareness or knowledge at any level of its cognitive

development.”¹⁷ Consider first when a young child forms its first concepts, e.g., of a “bottle.” Such a concept is “a mental integration of two or more units possessing the same distinguishing (characteristic(s)), with their particular measurements omitted.”¹⁸ A fundamental principle of Rand’s theory of concepts is that the characteristics of things stand in quantitative relationships, so that they can be measured by means of a standard that serves as a unit. A bottle may be defined as a rigid cylindrical container with a narrowed opening at one end made to contain liquid. This definition specifies the distinguishing characteristics of a bottle, for example, that it is a rigid cylindrical container, but omits other factors: such as precise size and weight, the material it is made of (glass, plastic, or something else), the liquid it is made to contain, and so forth. To grasp the concept of a bottle, the young child does not have to be able to give a verbal definition or to know anything about measurement. The child operates within a specific *context of knowledge* in which he differentiates the bottle from other objects in his visual field.¹⁹ In this context, the child is able to grasp similarity perceptually, and will only later learn the definition of a bottle. Indeed, even when he grows up, the child may never realize that his ability to understand the word “bottle” has anything to do with measurement.²⁰ As the child acquires concepts and learns facts, his context of knowledge steadily expands. For the context of knowledge includes not only differences and similarities of objects which are observable within one’s perceptual field, but also all the knowledge which one has accumulated up to that point, including prior observations, concepts, and definitions. Rand’s term “context,” as I understand it, refers to the total facts which a particular person knows about reality at a particular time and place, and what is implied by this knowledge. Within a given epistemic context one forms new concepts and acquires new knowledge by discovering certain existing relationships among the objects in one’s field of awareness. This may be accomplished by directly perceiving similarities or differences, or by drawing on other, previously formed concepts, or both. According to Rand we can only know reality in a specific context. It is a grievous error to overlook the context of knowledge, by ignoring the concepts which an epistemic agent has, or does not have, at its disposal: for example, if we deny that a young child can form a concept of a “bottle” because he cannot state the definition. In general what one is justified in believing depends upon the context: one might be justified in believing that *p* in one context, but not in another context in which the available information does not warrant the conclusion that *p*.

The second important feature of Rand’s epistemology which Long neglects is her view of scientific knowledge. In his exposition of Aristotle, Long distinguishes between different forms of knowledge. For Aristotle observes that “it is impossible to know what a thing is if we are ignorant of whether it is.”²¹ For example, we must know that there is an eclipse, before we can discover what an eclipse is. This involves finding the cause of the eclipse, by which we understand what an eclipse is, namely, a privation of light from the Moon caused by the Earth’s blocking the light of the Sun. It

is only when we grasp the cause that we have true knowledge of the essence of the phenomenon. As he says in the *Physics*, “Knowledge is the object of our inquiry, and we do not think we know a thing until we have grasped the ‘why’ of it (which is to grasp its primary cause).”²² Aristotle thus distinguishes between “mere” knowledge that something exists, and scientific knowledge of that thing, which enables us to explain or understand it. Scientific explanation, according to Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics*, involves the demonstration of facts from more fundamental causal principles. All the theorems of a science such as astronomy must be derived from its first principles, which are a relatively few indemonstrable propositions called posits and axioms. The posits are propositions concerning the essential nature of the objects studied by the science. The axioms are principles such as the law of non-contradiction. It seems undeniable (and Long agrees) that Aristotle has a narrow foundationalist view of scientific knowledge, in the sense that all scientific knowledge is derived from a relatively few principles.

But Long argues that, when it is asked how we “know” the few basic principles of a science (i.e., how we are justified in believing them), Aristotle has a neo-classical broad foundationalist (or negative coherentist) view of knowledge. In support of this interpretation, Long appeals to Aristotle’s remark in the *Topics* that dialectic is used to consider the first principles of a science such as astronomy or medicine.²³ Dialectic, for Aristotle, is a mode of reasoning which employs reputable beliefs (*endoxa*) or appearances (*phainomena*) as its premises.²⁴ In contrast to the first principles of the sciences, which are reliable in themselves, “the reputable beliefs are those which seem to be the case to all persons or to most persons or to the wise persons—and of these, to all or to most or to the most notable and reputable.”²⁵ Long is correct to call attention to the importance of dialectical reasoning for Aristotle. For example, Aristotle uses a similar method in the *Metaphysics* to defend the basic principles of logic, including the law of non-contradiction and the law of the excluded middle.²⁶

Long’s interpretation is controversial, however, when he contends that Aristotle understands the *endoxa* very expansively to include most beliefs, rather than a relatively small set of beliefs which have survived the critical scrutiny of previous scientists and philosophers. Aristotle also says in the *Topics* that “not every belief that appears to be reputable is actually reputable. For none of the things called reputable beliefs reveal themselves entirely on the surface . . .”²⁷

Long is dealing with one of the deepest and most difficult issues in Aristotelian exegesis: how do we know the first principles of scientific knowledge? Sometimes Aristotle indicates that such knowledge derives from sense-experience. In *Posterior Analytics* II.19, about which Long has little to say, Aristotle says that knowledge of first principles derives from sense-perception (*aisthêsis*) and induction (*epagôgê*) leading to the comprehension (*nous*) of first principles. From perception of individuals like Callias we acquire through induction the knowledge of the universal man. Thus he states, “it is clear that it is necessary for us to become familiar with the

first things by means of induction; for perception too instills the universal in this way.”²⁸ At other places, noted by Long, Aristotle assigns to dialectic the task of establishing the first principles of the sciences.²⁹

It is hard to see how these two discussions of Aristotle’s are related. W. D. Ross has complained, “The statement that the first principles of science are approached by way of dialectic is nowhere brought into relation with the other statement that they are approached by induction; but we must remember that induction is one of the two modes of argument proper to dialectic.”³⁰ Ross refers to Aristotle’s distinction between deductive arguments, where one derives the necessary consequences of reputable beliefs, and inductive arguments, which rely on more familiar beliefs based on sense-perception. “Induction is a passage from particulars to universals, e.g., the argument that supposing the skilled pilot is the most effective, and likewise the skilled charioteer, then in general the skilled man is the best at his particular task.” Dialectic in general appeals to reputable beliefs, but inductive dialectic appeals to beliefs which are based on sense-perception (*kata tēn aisthēsin*) and is thus more convincing, clear, and persuasive.³¹ This suggests that, in the case of natural sciences such as astronomy and medicine, inductive dialectic will seek to justify first principles of demonstration by reasoning from reputable beliefs—that is, reputable because they are based on sense-perception.

Aristotle evidently uses this method in *De Caelo* (“On the Heavens”). He criticizes the cosmological theory of the Pythagorean philosophers that there is a fire at the center of the universe and that the earth is a star revolving around it with a counter-earth in opposition to ours. His primary objection is that the Pythagoreans did not justify their heliocentric view on the basis of sense-experience. Rather they were in the grips of a theory, which they defended on *a priori* grounds. “In all this they are not seeking for theories and causes to account for the appearances, but rather forcing the phenomena and trying to accommodate them to certain theories and beliefs of their own.”³² Aristotle defends the geocentric view, on the grounds that “the appearances—the changes of the shapes by which the order of the stars is determined—are fully accounted for on the hypothesis that the earth lies at the center.”³³ Aristotle turned out to be mistaken in holding the geocentric view, but he would have conceded this if sufficient evidence were forthcoming. For on his view, “principles have to be judged by their consequences, and especially their final result. And the result of the knowledge (*epistēmē*) of production is the product, and in that of nature it is always authoritatively the appearance based on sense-perception (*kata tēn aisthēsin*).”³⁴ These arguments imply that, for Aristotle, beliefs and appearances based on sense-perception have the best claim to be regarded as reputable, at least in the context of natural science.

Although Long does not discuss Rand’s view of scientific knowledge, he implies that her view resembles Aristotle’s: i.e., that they are both narrow foundationalists. For he remarks that they are “essentially in agreement” on axioms,

and that they both recognize the need for posits in the sense of statements of essence. Long evinces uncertainty, however, as to the extent to which Rand and Aristotle agree about essences. (p. 58 n. 36) As he notes, Rand distinguishes her own view of essences from that of Aristotle: “Aristotle regarded ‘essence’ as metaphysical; Objectivism regards it as epistemological.”³⁵ She states, “Aristotle held that definitions refer to metaphysical *essences*, which exist *in* concretes as a special element or formative power . . .” Long does not discuss Rand’s reasons for this thesis but, as we shall see, it is crucial for understanding her epistemology.³⁶

Although Rand did not write on the philosophy of science as such, her views can be gleaned from her remarks about definition and essence. She states, “a definition must identify the *nature* of the units, i.e., the *essential* characteristics without which the units would not be the kind of existents they are.” By identifying the essential characteristics, the definition implies all the other characteristics of these units.³⁷ Rand’s approach here is like Aristotle’s, in that definitions should involve a rule of fundamentality:

When a given group of existents has more than one characteristic distinguishing it from other existents, man must observe the relationships among these various characteristics and discover the one on which all the others (or the greatest number of others) depend, i.e., the fundamental characteristic without which the other would not be possible.³⁸

A characteristic is “fundamental” in the metaphysical sense, if it makes the greatest number of other characteristics possible; in the epistemological sense, if it explains the greatest number of others. In this context, characteristic *X* is more fundamental than characteristic *Y* just in case the existence of *Y* depends on the existence of *X*. This has to do, for example, with the causal dependence of *Y* on *X*.

The notion of hierarchy appears in Rand’s epistemology in different ways. The claim that a characteristic is “fundamental” must not be confused with the claim that the facts of perception constitute the “base” of cognition. For example, to explain how a Geiger counter works, we must appeal to the fact that it can detect radiation. The belief that a Geiger counter is an instrument used to detect subatomic particles is more “fundamental” than the belief that the Geiger counter is emitting clicking sounds, in the sense that the former explains the latter. Subatomic particles cause a gas contained in the Geiger counter to ionize, which in turn results in a pulse that is amplified and transmitted to a component which finally produces an audible or visible sign. In this case an unobservable fact is more “fundamental” than an observable fact. However, as Long has noted, Rand also maintains that our claims about the ultimate constituents of the universe must be “brought back” to the perceptual level: “You would have to say ‘this particle’ is that which acts in such and such a way on subatomic particles, which act in such and such a way on atoms, which act in such and

such a way on molecules, and all of that results in a material object such as this glass as distinguished from other material objects such as this ashtray.”³⁹ However, this claim that the perceptual level is “basic” is consistent with the claim that characteristics are “fundamental” even if they cannot be discriminated by direct perception. The latter claim concerns scientific knowledge, and should be compared with Aristotle’s theory of scientific knowledge.

On Rand’s view, it is a matter of objective fact whether a given characteristic is fundamental or not in the sense defined above. Hence, if one’s definition misidentifies the fundamental feature associated with the concept, then one’s definition is false. The definition of a Geiger counter would have been false if in fact the clicking noises were produced by sound waves of a certain sort. On Rand’s view “a definition is the condensation of a vast body of observations—and stands or falls with the truth or falsehood of these observations.”⁴⁰ Further, one builds on one’s definitions in turn, organizing concepts into propositions and using them to derive other propositions. Hence, “*the truth or falsehood of all of man’s conclusions, inferences, thought and knowledge rests on the truth or falsehood of his definitions.*”⁴¹

This leads us to Rand’s thesis, mentioned above, that essence is epistemological rather than metaphysical.

Objectivism holds that the essence of a concept is that fundamental characteristic(s) of its units on which the greatest number of other characteristics depend, and which distinguishes these units from all other existents within the field of man’s knowledge. Thus the essence of a concept is determined *contextually* and may be altered with the growth of man’s knowledge. The metaphysical referent of man’s concepts is not a special, separate metaphysical essence, but the *total* of the facts of reality he has observed, and this total determines which characteristics of a given group of existents he designates as *essential*. An essential characteristic is factual, in the sense that it does exist, does determine other characteristics and does distinguish a group of existents from all others; it is *epistemological* in the sense that the classification of “essential characteristic” is a device of man’s method of cognition—a means of classifying, condensing and integrating an ever-growing body of knowledge.”⁴²

This passage brings together the two important features of Rand’s thought which were discussed above: *contextualism* and *essentialism*. Whether a characteristic qualifies as fundamental depends upon one’s context of knowledge, i.e., “the entire field of a mind’s awareness or knowledge at any level of its cognitive development.”⁴³ According to Rand, “concepts stand for specific kinds of existents, including *all* the characteristics of these existents, observed and not-yet-observed, known and unknown.”⁴⁴

The open-ended set of things falling under a concept includes all existing things which stand in some objectively existing relationship of similarity. A definition of the concept, however, involves the identification of the essence or fundamental characteristic of the existents falling under the concept, and this can be arrived at only in a particular context of knowledge. The question, “what is the fundamental characteristic of a horse or of gold?” requires investigation (by scientists on the deepest level) and can only be answered within a particular context. Thus it may turn out for a given concept that in context C_1 a particular characteristic is fundamental for a concept, but in another context C_2 , when more is learned about the referent class, this characteristic may be explained in terms of more fundamental characteristics. Thus a characteristic may be essential in one context but not in another, and it is in this sense that Rand concludes that “essence” is an epistemological concept.

This has a further consequence: that it is only on the rational and conceptual level that we explain what we perceive. For example, our awareness that the red we perceive is an attribute—of an entity—has to be grasped rationally and conceptually. Rand disagrees with modern empiricists like David Hume who contend that it is illicit to speak of the “entity” to which redness belongs because *entity* does not appear to us separately from *redness*. The contents of our perceptual states can be specified only when we have formed the requisite concepts. Moreover, perception is restricted to particular entities, attributes, events, relations, etc. We are perceptually aware of only a limited number of entities. Rand uses the example of a flock of crows which could only remember up to three men. Human beings by contrast can use their conceptual faculty to reduce a vast amount of information to a minimal number of units.⁴⁵ Rand is certainly an empiricist in the sense that she claims that all knowledge has to be based on and traceable back to perception. However, this is only part of the story:

Remember that the perceptual level of awareness is the base of man’s conceptual development. Man forms concepts, as a system of classification, whenever the scope of perceptual data becomes too great for his mind to handle. Concepts stand for specific kinds of existents, including *all* the characteristics of these existents, observed and not-yet-observed, known and unknown.⁴⁶

Thus, Rand denies that the particularity of our discrete perceptual states limits the scope of our conceptual knowledge to the particular.

Long’s characterization of Rand as a “classical narrow foundationalist” is misleading, because (as argued above) it collapses her distinction between the conceptual and perceptual levels of awareness. Nevertheless, Long is correct that Rand regards perception as the ultimate basis of all knowledge, in the sense that our concepts and beliefs are justified only if they can be traced back to the perceptual level. To what extent, then, is the Objectivist epistemology vulnerable to his objections?

Long's first objection: He argues, "In most cases we simply have no idea what the experiential foundations of our beliefs are." (p. 31) But Long knows, for example, that the Earth is round, even if he cannot trace it back to the perceptual level.

Long's grounds for claiming that the Earth is round consist of so-called "reputable beliefs" (what Aristotle called *endoxa*). The reputability of a belief is determined by the number of its adherents and their degree of alleged wisdom. This gives one a *prima facie*, defeasible reason to believe it oneself. It is unreasonable to require Long to formulate a valid scientific experiment to confirm the roundness of the Earth. Long protests, "I do not know how to justify my belief that the Earth is round without appealing to *endoxa*. Yet surely it is something I know."

It is unlikely that Rand would be impressed with Long's claim to "know" this. She observes that instead of defining their terms, people often use words with the feeling "I kinda know what I mean."⁴⁷ Similarly, we may add, people "kinda know" the facts. If they believe some proposition strongly but are unable to support it with convincing evidence, they have "kinda-knowledge." If Long believes that the earth is round but is unable to respond convincingly to the arguments of a persistent flat-earth theorist, apart from arguing that "a lot of wise people believe it," he is in no stronger position than people who "kinda knew" the world was flat before 1492. Rand could respond, with good reason, that kinda-knowledge is not knowledge.

Rand could argue that a person with genuine knowledge that the earth is round can confirm it on the basis of his own experience. Aristotle, interestingly, argues along similar lines, appealing to perceptual appearances (*ta phainomena kata tēn aisthēsin*):

How else would eclipses of the moon show segments shaped as we see them? As it is, the shapes which the moon itself each month shows are of every kind—straight, gibbous, and concave—but in eclipses the outline is always curved; and since it is the interposition of the earth that makes the eclipse, the form of this line will be caused by the form of the earth's surface, which is therefore spherical. Again, our observations of the stars make it evident, not only that the earth is circular, but also that it is a circle of no great size. For quite a small change of position on our part to south or north causes a manifest alteration of the horizon. There is much change, I mean, in the stars which are overhead, and the stars seen are different, as one moves northward or southward. Indeed there are some stars seen in Egypt and in the neighborhood of Cyprus which are not seen in the northerly regions; and stars, which in the north are never beyond the range of observation, in those regions rise and set. All of which goes to show not only that the earth is circular in shape, but also that it is a sphere of no great size; for otherwise the

effect of so slight a change of place would not be so quickly apparent.⁴⁸

Long would respond that “even if I could formulate [a valid scientific experiment to confirm the roundness of the Earth], I simply do not have the time or resources to test it.” (p. 31) The point is well taken, but Long overlooks Rand’s contextualism. One’s context of knowledge includes not only immediately observable differences and similarities of objects within one’s perceptual field, but, on higher levels of knowledge, all the knowledge which has been accumulated up to that point, including prior observations, concepts, and definitions. As noted earlier, a definition, for Rand, is “the condensation of a vast body of observations.”⁴⁹ Similarly, our basic knowledge of the Earth—its location in space, its shape, size, and so forth—is based on numerous prior observations and reasonings. Rand would surely maintain that we do not know that the Earth is round unless this knowledge is “brought back” to the perceptual level. But this does not entail the preposterous requirement that each person has to carry out the impossible task of performing a vast number of observations by himself in support of every claim. Provided that one understands the scientific method and that one has good reason to believe that the requisite observations have been made and the scientific method applied in a conscientious manner, one can meet the challenge of the flat-earth theorist.

Long’s second objection: Historical knowledge cannot be reduced to sense-perception, for example, the belief that the Norman Conquest occurred in 1066 (p. 31).

Obviously, barring the invention of a time machine, one cannot directly observe historical events such as the Norman Conquest. Nonetheless, a claim to *know* historical events must be ultimately based on evidence which can be observed. Written documents are important, but the reliability of these must be confirmed by means of further evidence regarding how the documents were preserved and transmitted. The authenticity and truthfulness of literary works like Homer’s *Iliad* have been questioned, which is why Heinrich Schliemann’s excavation of Troy and other ancient sites was important: he argued that observable archeological evidence provided independent confirmation of many details in Homer’s epics. As with astronomy, we cannot all be historians. Whether we can justifiably claim to know historical facts which we do not have the time to research ourselves depends upon whether we have a basic understanding of the methods of historical scholarship and whether we have good reason to believe the methods are applied in a rigorous and reliable manner. If we learn that historians are relying on bad evidence or are themselves falsifying and misusing evidence, we are not entitled to claim that we know such facts. For example, after Lorenzo Valla proved that the “Donation of Constantine” was a forgery, it was no longer credible for anyone to claim to “know” that the Emperor Constantine had granted universal temporal power to the Roman pope.

Long's third objection: Rand's claim that human beings can transmit knowledge and share it with others is inconsistent with her alleged foundationalism, since each person can know a particular fact only if he can trace it himself back to its perceptual foundations. (p. 32)

The reply to this should be evident from what has already been said. It is not necessary to make every observation first hand on which our knowledge is based. We can justifiably draw on the conclusions of others provided that we have good reason to think that they are using a rationally defensible methodology and that they are applying this methodology in a consistent and conscientious manner. This is one of the main reasons why a person should be educated in a wide array of subjects. Even if one does not plan to become a philosopher, historian, psychologist, or physicist or social scientist, one should at least understand the basic principles or methodology of these fields, so that one can understand the claims issuing from these fields and incorporate them in the appropriate manner within one's context of knowledge. Recall that on Rand's theory of concepts, the essence of a concept, as expressed in its definition, involves a fundamental characteristic of its units, which explains and implies their other characteristics. This definition is a condensation of the observations made by scientists and other specialists who have developed the concepts. When knowledge is shared, these concepts and propositions containing these concepts are employed by those who did not carry out the observations but who are able to grasp the definition and consider new implications in other fields. This is a legitimate procedure, provided that one observes the constraints mentioned above.

Long's fourth objection: Since it is impossible to trace our beliefs back in the way Rand requires to "primitive and indubitable perceptual foundations," her theory leads to skepticism. (p. 32)

The skeptical problem is one of bridging the gap between knowledge and objective reality. Long suggests three strategies: maintaining extremely high standards for both knowledge and reality, which leads to skepticism; lowering the standards for objective reality, which leads to subjective idealism; and lowering the standards for knowledge, which threatens to substitute an ersatz kinda-knowledge for the real article. Rand proposes an alternative approach, which requires high standards for reality and knowledge but applies these standards only within a context. On such a view a conclusion is certain when it is supported by all the evidence which is available in a specific context. This allows, however, that subsequent discoveries may give rise to a wider context in which the prior conclusion is called into question. Skepticism becomes a problem only when one ignores the fact that the knowledge is contextual and demands an absolute answer to a question, i.e., one that is independent of any context.

The full implications of the notion of the "contextual absolute" admittedly remain to be worked out. Rand suggests that what is known to be true in a certain context will continue to be true—provided it is appropriately qualified—in a wider

context. Some examples support this. For example, we may conclude that water always boils at 212°F because we only observe it at sea level. But later we may find that it boils at a lower temperature on a mountain top, so that we must qualify our original claim, namely, that water always boils at 212°F *at sea level*, and we seek to find a more fundamental explanation of why it boils at different temperatures and different altitudes. Even if we concede this move, however, there seem to be cases in which what we “know” in one context turns out to be false in a wider context. We may convict a criminal of a crime “beyond a reasonable doubt,” based on eye witness testimony, forensic and circumstantial evidence, and only later acquire an entirely new form of information, such as DNA evidence, which calls into question our earlier conclusion. This example would suggest that we could justifiably claim to “know” or be “certain” of something in a particular context, but it could turn out that we do not know it in a wider context.⁵⁰ Moreover, we may wonder whether it is possible for different epistemic agents operating in different contexts of knowledge C_1 and C_2 to arrive at disparate beliefs B_1 and B_2 each of which is “certain” in its respective context? Or if the beliefs seem to be opposed, do we have good reason to think that beliefs which are justified in different contexts will eventually converge?

Long's fifth objection Rand's foundationalist epistemology is at variance with our actual method of inquiry, which is to use our ordinary beliefs as starting points. (p. 32)

Again, this criticism overlooks the contextualist character of Rand's theory of knowledge. Inquiry always occurs within a context of knowledge as described above. Insofar as the “ordinary beliefs” Long appeals to are established within this context, then the procedure is acceptable. But as mentioned before these beliefs must be properly grounded. If we appeal to the conclusions of others we must have good reasons, based on available evidence, that these conclusions have been arrived at through reliable methodologies ultimately based on the perceptual level. Vague appeals to “the collective wisdom of mankind” will not suffice.

Long's sixth objection There is no good reason for regarding the data of perception or our perceptual-level of awareness as privileged. (p. 32)

Rand holds that perception is the basis of all knowledge, because it is on the level of sense perception that the epistemic agent causally interacts with the objects of knowledge. Perception is self-evident in that it is the ultimate source of evidence on which all other knowledge is based. It is not possible to prove that the senses are valid in the sense of deriving the conclusion that they are valid from premises for which one has evidence independent of the senses themselves. The validity of the senses belongs with axioms such as the principle that consciousness is conscious. Rand holds that any attempt to “prove” such an axiom is self-contradictory, because the very act of proof presupposes consciousness. The only possible defense of axioms is by Aristotelian “negative demonstration”—or, in Rand's terms, by showing

that the attempted denial of the principle commits the fallacy of the “stolen concept,” by assuming what it purports to disprove. Rand asserts, “The arguments of those who attack the senses are merely variants of the fallacy of the ‘stolen concept.’”⁵¹ The basis for this claim is evidently found in the following passage:

Man’s senses are his only direct cognitive contact with reality and, therefore, his only *source* of information. Without sensory evidence, there can be no concepts; without concepts, there can be no language; without language, there can be no knowledge and no science.⁵²

In order to deny the validity of the senses, one must use language, which requires concepts, which in turn requires the senses. To deny the validity of the senses is to deny the validity of the language used to challenge the validity of the senses. In order to grasp reality we have no alternative to working from the evidence of the senses, but it does not follow that any perceptual belief or judgment is infallible.

In conclusion, although Roderick Long mounts a vigorous and often insightful discussion of Ayn Rand’s view of theoretical reason, his attack is off target because it misses important features of her epistemology such as her contextualism. Moreover, she does not espouse a “Platonic” hegemony of the data of perception over other forms of cognition. It would be more exact to speak of a division of labor between reason and perception. Perception serves as our primary causal link with reality, but it is up to the rational faculty to interpret, explain, and extrapolate from the data of perception. The thesis that perception is cognitively basic may be understood in terms of an agricultural analogy. Land is basic to agriculture in that without land the practice of farming is impossible. But land can yield crops only through the rational, deliberate actions of the farmer. Yet the farmer must respect the land, and can grow only crops which the land is capable of yielding. Similarly, perception is basic to all knowledge. But it does not follow that all other forms of cognition are subordinate or inferior to the perceptual awareness. In an important sense perception can lead to knowledge only if it is guided by reason. But reason can succeed only if it follows the dictum,

PERCEPTION, TO BE COMMANDED, MUST BE OBEYED.⁵³

[I am grateful to Mahesh Ananth, Robert Bass, Carrie-Ann Biondi, Al Decker, Christopher Johnson, and James Taylor, philosophy graduate students at Bowling Green State University who participated in a lively discussion of Roderick Long's essay and also offered comments on this paper. Much of what is presented here was inspired by our discussions, although these individuals are not responsible for the precise form they have taken in this paper. I also received some very valuable editorial criticisms of an earlier draft from William Thomas.]

Notes

1. Aristotle, Plato, and David Hume are difficult philosophers who are understood in widely different ways by modern scholars. Long's interpretations of them are controversial but not eccentric. I take exception to some parts of his interpretation of Aristotle, as noted below. I will however accept his reconstructions of Plato's and Hume's views for the purpose of this discussion, in order to focus on his comparison between Aristotle and Rand, and his criticisms of Rand's epistemology.
2. Rand, *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology: Expanded 2nd Edition*, ed. Harry Binswanger and Leonard Peikoff (New York: NAL, 1990; henceforth cited as "IOE"), p. 191: "... the distinction between the practical and the theoretical . . . is a distinction which I do not recognize. 'Practical' means acting in this world, in reality. If what we do works, how is that possible if it doesn't correspond to reality?"
3. Peikoff, *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1991), p. 152: Peikoff states that Rand's definition of reason implies that "reason is the faculty that enables man to discover the nature of existents" or to acquire "knowledge of reality."
4. IOE, p. 22.
5. Ibid., p. 295.
6. Peikoff, *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand*, pp. 54, 130–33.
7. IOE, p. 1.
8. Ibid., p. 5.
9. Ibid., p. 5–6.
10. Although Rand does not provide a systematic statement of her ontology, her view resembles Aristotle's. She holds that reality consists of existents, that is, particulars which exist. (Ibid., p. 241) There is a primary category of existents, which she calls "entities" (corresponding to Aristotle's "substances" or *ousiai*) on which other existents depend: attributes, events, relationships, etc. (Ibid., p. 15) On her view "a fact" is merely an epistemological convenience, a way of saying "This is something which exists in reality." (Ibid., 241) In contrast, some philosophers have a fact-based ontology (as in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus*: "The world is everything that is the case.") Rand, like Aristotle, has an entity-based metaphysics. She credits Aristotle with identifying "the fact that only concretes exist."
11. Ibid., p. 6.
12. Ibid., p. 7.
13. Ibid., p. 10.

14. David Kelley, *The Evidence of the Senses* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), pp. 197–207, 218–38.
15. This was suggested in discussion by Robert Bass.
16. Kelley, *The Evidence of the Senses*, p. 180.
17. IOE, p. 43.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
21. Aristotle *Posterior Analytics* II.8.93a20.
22. Aristotle *Physics* II.3.194b18–20. Here Aristotle uses the verb *eidenai*, “to know.” In the *Posterior Analytics* I.13.78a25–6 he makes the same point about *epistêmê*: “knowledge (*epistêmê*) of the reason why is due to the primary cause.”
23. Aristotle *Topics* I.2.101a36–b4; translated by Long on pp. 19–20.
24. *Topics* I.1.100a29–30. See also *Prior Analytics* I.1.24b11–12, *Posterior Analytics* I.19.81b20; *Metaphysics* III.1.995b24. Compare *Nicomachean Ethics* VII.1.1145b3–7 which also treats *endoxa* and *phainomena* as equivalent.
25. Aristotle *Topics* I.1.100b21–3. Aristotle’s point is that a belief has the greatest claim to be reputable (*endoxon*) when it is believed by the most reputable person (*endoxos*). Aristotle assumes a similar account of reputable beliefs in *Nicomachean Ethics* VII.1.1145b2–6; cited by Long p. 23 and p. 59 n. 42.
26. Aristotle calls the technique “elenctic” or negative demonstration at *Metaphysics* IV.4.1006a11–12, but he assigns this task to dialectic at *Posterior Analytics* I.11.77a26–35.
27. Aristotle *Topics* I.1.100b26–8.
28. Aristotle *Posterior Analytics* II.19.100b4–5.
29. In addition to the passages of the *Topics* cited above, see *Prior Analytics* I.30.46a28–30 which implies that dialectic has this role.
30. W. D. Ross, *Aristotle* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995; 6th edition with a new introduction by J. L. Ackrill), p. 55.
31. Aristotle *Topics* I.12.105a10–19, cf. 1.100a25–7.
32. Aristotle *De Caelo* II.13.293a21–7.
33. *De Caelo* II.14.297a4–6. He also discusses how astronomers Eudoxus and Callippus developed theories of celestial spheres within which planets and stars moved, in order to explain the appearances: see *Metaphysics* XII.8.1073b32–3. Compare *De Caelo* III.4.303a22–3 where he criticizes the atomic theory of Leucippus and Democritus because it conflicts with many reputable beliefs and appearances based on sense-perception (*kata tèn aisthêsin*).
34. Aristotle *De Caelo* III.7.306a13–17.
35. IOE, p. 52.
36. Long suggests that “an Aristotelian essence is closer to what Rand means by an identity. For example, in *Metaphysics* VII.6, Aristotle tells us that primary substances are identical with their essences. Certainly, Rand agrees with Aristotle that *identity* is metaphysical, not epistemological, and that reference to a thing’s identity is what is fundamental in causal explanation.” (p. 58 n. 36) However, Rand holds that the identity of a thing includes *everything* that it is. That is, “each of its characteristics has the same metaphysical status:

each constitutes a part of the entity's identity." (Peikoff, "The Analytic-Synthetic Dichotomy," in IOE, p. 98) Aristotle's view seems to differ from this when he says that primary substances are identical with their essential attributes but not their accidental attributes. For Rand being snub-nosed is part of the identity of Socrates, in addition to being human. Hence, Long (p. 58 n. 36) seems mistaken when he equates Aristotle's concept of "essence" with Rand's concept of "identity."

37. IOE, p. 42.
38. Ibid., p. 45.
39. Ibid., p. 295.
40. Ibid., p. 48.
41. Ibid., p. 49.
42. Ibid., p. 52.
43. Ibid., p. 43.
44. Ibid., p. 65.
45. Ibid., p. 63.
46. Ibid., p. 65.
47. Ibid., p. 50.
48. Aristotle *De Caelo* III.14.297b23–298a9; translation by J. L. Stocks, from *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).
49. Ibid., p. 48.
50. Peikoff claims that if a person proceeds rationally, his knowledge at one stage will not be contradicted by later discoveries (*Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand*, p. 173). It is not clear how Peikoff would deal with a case of a new category of evidence, such as DNA evidence, which only becomes available at a later time. It is noteworthy that Rand herself opposed the death penalty on epistemological grounds (see Nathaniel Branden's discussion of this issue in *The Objectivist Newsletter* January, 1963, p. 3). Similar problems can arise regarding our concepts: Rand allows that with the growth of knowledge, conceptual reclassifications may be necessary: concepts may have to be reassigned to a new location (e.g., the whale redefined as a mammal rather than a fish) or some theoretical distinctions may be abandoned as invalid (such as the classification of human beings according to their humors, as phlegmatic, bilious, etc.). (IOE, pp. 66, 239) It would seem, then, more consistent to allow for the possibility of continual revision of our knowledge as the context widens.
51. Ibid., p. 4.
52. Rand, "Kant Versus Sullivan," *Philosophy: Who Needs It* (New York: Bobbs Merrill, 1982), p. 108.
53. Rand (IOE, p. 82) offers another paraphrase of the dictum, "nature, to be commanded, must be obeyed."

Commentary

Flourishing and Survival in Ayn Rand A Reply to Roderick Long

Eyal Mozes

Like other organisms, man needs to act in order to survive; but unlike other organisms, man does not take the needed actions automatically. Man must choose to act to sustain his own life, and find out how to do so. That is why man needs morality. The standard of moral value, therefore, is man's survival.

This view is original to Rand. The Aristotelian view, which Roderick Long contrasts in his paper with Rand's, takes the standard of value to be "flourishing," or "the good life;" this is the alternative Long lists, at the start of section VIII, as "flourishing survival qua man." (p. 39) Objectivism regards "the good life" as a perfectly valid concept (though rather than "the good life," Objectivists more often use Rand's phrase "man's life qua man"); but for Objectivism, the good life, or man's life qua man, consists of those principles of action which man needs to act on *in order to survive*. As I note below, this view does not fit into either of Long's two alternatives of "bare survival qua man" vs. "flourishing survival qua man."

Since I am not an expert on Hobbes, I can't evaluate to what extent Long is correct in claiming that Rand's approach is similar to Hobbes'. Whether or not Rand shares some methodological characteristics with Hobbes, her ethical and political conclusions are clearly very different, e.g., from Hobbes' advocacy of absolute dictatorship; these differences are a result of Rand's and Hobbes' very different views of human nature. In any case, I believe Long's characterization of Rand's approach to the foundations of ethics is essentially correct (except for the alleged Kantian element, as I discuss below); Rand does take survival as the standard of value, by which all ethical principles need to be justified. In my reply, I discuss how the various elements in Rand's ethics are connected to the standard of survival, and demonstrate that, contrary to Long, there is no contradiction between Rand's theoretical discussions and the characterizations in her novels. I also discuss how an Aristotelian standard of flourishing can be reconciled with Rand's approach.¹

1. Rand's epistemology and her meta-ethics

Long notes the connection between Rand's epistemology—specifically, her

objection to accepting emotional evaluations as valid until they have been validated based on perceptual data—and her commitment to survival as the standard of value.

We have seen that on the Randian approach, beliefs are justified only when they have been traced back to their experiential foundations in sense-perception, and sense-perception alone. As noted, when one tries to restrict oneself to that foundation, it is easier to derive an instrumental model of practical reason than a substantive one. Hence it is Rand's epistemological commitments that stand between her and a justification of flourishing survival. (p. 52)

On this, I fully agree with Long. I will leave it to Fred Miller to comment on Long's objections to Rand's epistemology; but I submit that the greatest strength of Rand's meta-ethics is precisely its connection to an epistemology requiring justification based on perceptual data.

The Aristotelian view as advocated by Long provides no objective method for telling what flourishing consists of, and whether living a certain way is or is not flourishing. Many Aristotelian thinkers express strong judgments on what flourishing consists of, but they have no way to prove their judgments based on facts; ultimately, their method comes down to "you can just see, by observing a person living this way, that he is (or is not) flourishing." Any disagreements among Aristotelians on what flourishing consists of are therefore irresolvable.²

Aristotle places great emphasis on the need for experience in virtue; a virtuous person has developed, through experience, his "practical wisdom," i.e., his ability to judge what actions would or would not be consistent with his flourishing:

While young men become geometricians and mathematicians and wise in matters like these, it is thought that a young man of practical wisdom cannot be found. The cause is that such wisdom is concerned not only with universals but with particulars, which become familiar from experience, but a young man has no experience, for it is length of time that gives experience.³

But would the man of practical wisdom, gained through experience, be able to give *evidence* for his judgments, and justify them to a less experienced person? From my reading of Aristotle's ethics, and also from Long's discussion, this does not seem to be a requirement. For me personally, that has always been the aspect of Aristotle's ethics that I liked the least; it seems to justify the attitude which, as a child, I encountered in many adults and deeply resented, i.e., the attitude that because of their claim to greater experience they knew better than I did and had no need to give me any reasons. The use of "flourishing" as the standard of value naturally leads to this kind of approach; it is a standard that does not allow for objective grounds for giving

reasons, and so all that is left is people's different intuitions of what flourishing consists of—in Long's words, "accepting as true the normative judgments implicit in our desires and emotions." (p. 53) How, then, when people's desires and emotions conflict, do we distinguish good judgments from bad ones? With no requirement to reduce one's judgments to their foundations in observable fact, how much "experience" each person has remains as the only semi-reasonable criterion.

This aspect of Aristotle's ethics has been corrected by Rand. Rand's approach provides a principled criterion, based on the facts, for what is or is not part of the good life; something is part of the good life if it contributes to one's survival. On Rand's approach, therefore, value judgments are basically the same as medical judgments and can be argued for and proven the same way: by identifying the evidence for what in fact contributes to man's survival. In contrast to the approach suggested by Long, there is no need to rely on emotions, or on "experience" without explanation, and disagreements are resolvable by the evidence.

Like all objective concepts, the concept of the good life is open-ended; new knowledge can change our understanding of the good life, or even change some aspects of the nature of the good life.⁴ However, the criterion for the good life, and the basic method for discovering it, remain the same—the good life is what contributes to man's survival.

2. Determining what is needed for survival

How, then, do we determine what is needed for survival?

It is easy to see how by the standard of survival, for example, drinking water can be judged as good and walking into the path of a speeding car can be judged as bad. But life as the standard of value does not mean immediate survival as the only goal. As Leonard Peikoff explains: "A self-destructing action need not be immediately fatal....It is possible to deteriorate gradually for years, breathing all the while, but increasingly damaged." And our judgment of actions causing such drawn-out destruction as wrong is still guided by the standard of survival. "The size and form of the damage are not relevant here. No threat to vitality—no undermining of one's capacity to deal successfully with the environment—can be countenanced if life is the standard of value. The reason is that no such threat can be inflicted *safely* on so complex and delicate an integration as a living organism."⁵

How do we identify actions which are self-destructing, which damage one's ability to survive, if they are not immediately fatal? And conversely, how do we identify actions which contribute to one's ability to survive, if their benefit is not immediate?

A living organism can be seen as a complex machine, aimed at its own survival. The role of its various organs and faculties can be understood analogously to understanding the parts of a machine.

For example, an automobile is designed for the purpose of traveling. Some of its parts—e.g., the engine, or the steering-wheel—contribute directly to this purpose.

Other parts make only an indirect contribution; the cooling and lubrication systems, for example, do not directly help to move the automobile, but are necessary to maintain the engine's functioning; the engine's hood does not directly help to move the automobile, but contributes to this purpose by protecting the engine from rain, falling objects and other hazards.⁶

Similarly, a living organism has many organs and faculties, all having evolved for the same ultimate goal: survival. Some of these faculties contribute directly to maintaining the organism's life. Others have a more indirect role, protecting the organism from external damage, or helping to maintain specific faculties which, in turn, help its survival. In some cases, their role may not be obvious without specific knowledge and thinking about the nature and environment of the organism (just as the role of the cooling system in an automobile will not be obvious without knowledge of the engine's operation and of the effects of high temperatures on its materials). To understand the value-significance of an organ or faculty in an organism, we need to identify its contribution—direct or indirect—to the organism's survival.⁷

As an example, consider the lion's mane. The mane does not do anything directly to maintain the lion's life, and it might seem, at first glance, that it does not have such a role at all. It is therefore tempting, in analyzing the role of a lion's mane, to adopt the analog of the flourishing standard, and conclude that having a mane is not needed for survival, but is part of the lion's flourishing; if a lion were to lose its mane, or be born with a small mane, that would not be destructive to its survival, but would make its life less full, less flourishing, or less leonine. Further study, however, proves that the mane does have an important role in the lion's survival. The lion's conditions of living are such that it often gets into fights with other lions; it is common, in such fights, for the lion to receive blows to the head. The mane, by deflecting and cushioning such blows, can prevent them from wounding, or even killing, the lion.⁸ It is this value-significance of the mane which originally caused its evolution. If a lion were to lose its mane, that would not be immediately fatal; in some cases, it might even end up *never* bringing about the lion's death, since the lion might happen to live the rest of its life never receiving any blows to the head. Still, such an event should be regarded as destructive for the lion, because of the mane's potential role protecting the lion's survival.

3. Determining what is needed for man's survival

What is good or bad for a human being is identified, basically, by the same method. We identify the requirements of man's survival by observing facts about man's biological nature and about the characteristic actions man needs to take to sustain his life. Some of the requirements of man's survival are obvious; others may only be identified by extensive study, observation and thinking.

The requirements of man's survival include the needs of maintaining his physical health. If such requirements are not fulfilled, this will not be immediately fatal; however, it will put one's body in a damaged state, which will make death from

injury or illness more likely in the long run. Generally, the connection of physical health to survival is non-controversial, and is obvious to most people.

The central non-obvious fact about man's means of survival is one which Rand has fully identified for the first time: man's central means of survival is *reason*. This identification has crucial consequences for ethics. It is the basis of Rand's view of rationality as the central virtue. Further, since reason is man's means of survival, anything which helps to maintain man's rational faculty is needed for survival. An entire new class of requirements for man's life is thus opened: psychological requirements.

Rand, of course, was not the first to realize that man's psychological well-being has requirements; but she was the first to connect psychological needs to *survival*. These psychological requirements are the ones that Aristotelians such as Long find the hardest to reconcile with survival as the standard, and that they therefore use to argue that some other standard—the standard of flourishing—is required. On Rand's view, however, such needs can be proven to be necessary for survival; not by demonstrating a direct causal connection, but—analogously to understanding the role of a cooling system in an automobile—by demonstrating their role in maintaining the proper operation of one specific faculty—reason—which, in turn, is needed for survival.

Contemporary medical knowledge about stress-related diseases, and about the effects of one's psychological state on recovery from illness, provides further confirmation of the relation of psychological requirements to survival. It is now known that man's psychological well-being is crucial for his physical health. This medical evidence sheds interesting new light on the role of such requirements in survival, but Rand's argument does not depend on it; Rand connects these requirements to survival through their role in maintaining man's reason.

Because of the centrality of reason to the requirements of man's life, and because of the many requirements needed for its proper maintenance, I think the most essential division of the requirements of man's survival is into two categories: existential requirements—requirements which directly serve man's physical survival; and psychological requirements—requirements which serve man's survival by maintaining the functioning of his rational faculty. Some requirements belong purely to one or the other of these categories, while others have elements of both.

In addition to reason, Rand identified two central values for man: purpose and self-esteem.⁹ Purpose has a direct, existential role in survival; it is the commitment to using one's reason for achieving the goals that would help one's survival. In addition, purpose also has a psychological element. For man's rational faculty to function properly, it requires a purpose; without such a purpose, man can gradually lose the ability and motivation to fully focus his mind, threatening his success in dealing with future problems. This means that purpose remains necessary for survival, even in those cases in which its existential role in survival does not apply (for example, Rand's view of purpose implies that if a person has a job which does not

challenge his abilities, then even if it paid enough to provide for his economic needs, it would be self-destructive for him to remain in that job and not find any more challenging purpose).

A corollary of the need for purpose is the need for forming values. Purpose, if it is to guide one's actions and fulfill its existential and psychological roles, must not be abstract; it can't consist of general ideas like "I should do what I need to survive" or "I should be productive;" it has to consist of *specific* values—central values relating to one's productive activity, as well as values in all other areas of life—which guide one's concrete, day-to-day actions. The existential role of purpose implies that such values should be ones that objectively contribute to survival. The psychological role of purpose implies that such values—or at least the most central of them—should be held strongly and passionately, and experienced by the person as extremely important to him.

Self-esteem, in contrast, is a purely psychological requirement. "Self-esteem, as his inviolate certainty that one's mind is competent to think and one's person is worthy of happiness, which means: is worthy of living."¹⁰ Such certainty has no direct, existential role in survival, and it is tempting to conclude that it has no role in survival at all, and should be valued, instead, as an aspect of flourishing. Rand, however, did regard self-esteem as necessary for survival, through its role in maintaining one's motivation to continuously use one's reason.

The need to act on principles is, again, both an existential and a psychological requirement. Existentially, principles are the cognitive equivalent of concepts; principles are the means by which a person holds in his mind his entire range of knowledge about the requirements of his life and the means of achieving them.¹¹ In addition, principles also have a crucial *psychological* role in man's life, as a precondition for achieving self-esteem. Self-esteem requires a standard for evaluating one's own actions, abilities and character; "to live requires a sense of self-value, but man, who has no automatic values, has no automatic sense of self-esteem and must earn it by shaping his soul in the image of his moral ideal."¹² Survival is much too abstract a standard to apply directly. Moral principles provide more concrete standards, which can be applied by a person in evaluating himself.

Happiness is another central psychological requirement. Rand defines happiness as "a state of non-contradictory joy;"¹³ it is a long-range emotional state, which consists of the awareness that one is consistently, in the long run, achieving one's values. Happiness is therefore not a separate goal; one is acting for it whenever one is acting for any of one's values. Its relation to the concepts of survival and the good life can be summarized as: happiness is the internal awareness of that which is, externally, the good life, and which leads to survival. At the same time, happiness is itself a requirement for man's survival, like self-esteem, in maintaining one's motivation to use one's reason.

Another psychological requirement for man, which Rand has identified, is the need to observe objective, concrete instances of one's abstract values.¹⁴ This need

explains the role of art in man's life and is also central to understanding man's need for interpersonal relationships.

In understanding these and other requirements for survival—and, consequently, for the good life—the method is basically the same. Once we have identified the basic faculties which man needs to sustain his life, we observe what is needed to maintain these faculties; and this provides the evidence for demonstrating what is a value by the standard of survival. This is the method for establishing the Objectivist virtues, and all other valid moral values.

4. What does “survival qua man” mean?

Long raises the question of precisely what Rand means by “survival qua man.” He suggests two alternatives:

Bare survival qua man: Survival is to be understood in a merely biological sense, as staying alive. The qualification “qua man” merely places a strategic constraint on the means to that end (i.e., it indicates that in determining the necessary means to such survival one must take into account the nature of the entity whose survival is being sought). So long as one is human and stays alive (long enough), one is surviving qua man.

Flourishing survival qua man: Survival qua man is a certain kind of survival, not just staying alive as such. The qualification “qua man” is a constitutive constraint on the nature of the end itself (i.e., some kinds of survival count as truly human while others do not). One can thus be human and stay alive indefinitely without surviving qua man. (p. 39)

Long quotes several passages in which Rand characterizes “survival qua man,” and finds an ambiguity between the two interpretations. But in light of the above discussion, we can see that Rand's view in fact fits into neither of these two interpretations; the ambiguity results only from an attempt to fit Rand's view into an inappropriate dichotomy.

On Rand's view, “survival qua man” is a certain kind of survival, not just staying alive as such; it is survival with reasonable physical health, reason, purpose, self-esteem, and the other values I discuss above. However, the qualification “qua man” is a strategic constraint on the means to the end of staying alive; the criterion for what “survival qua man” consists in is that these are the values which can be demonstrated to contribute to one's long-term survival.

It is possible for a person to act irrationally, destroying some of the above values for himself, without this actually shortening his life (just as a lion could lose his mane, without this actually shortening his life, if he then happens to never receive blows to the head). Loss of these values is a threat to one's life; it is likely to destroy

one's life; but, in particular cases, it may turn out in hindsight that the threat was never actualized.

So one *can* "be human and stay alive indefinitely without surviving qua man," i.e., without doing what is likely to keep one alive. It is not true that "so long as one is human and stays alive (long enough), one is surviving qua man," if one's staying alive was purely a result of chance, contrary to what one's actions could rationally be expected to cause. It is true, however, that so long as one is human and acts in a way that can rationally be expected to help him stay alive (long enough), one is surviving qua man.

5. Interpersonal ethics

Given the above background, let us now turn to the question on which Long focuses for most of his discussion of ethics: how does Rand's approach justify principles of interpersonal ethics? Specifically, why shouldn't an egoist act dishonestly or initiate force?

5.1. Rand's alleged Kantian strand

Long poses the question as: "why should an egoist care about other people's rights?" When discussing Rand's philosophy, this is a very misleading way of putting the question. Rand didn't use the concept of rights as a concept of interpersonal ethics, relevant to guiding an individual's actions; rights are principles guiding the organization of a social system, so as to make the society suitable for human life.¹⁵ As Rand uses the concept, an egoist should *not* care about other people's rights, as far as his individual actions are concerned (except when his actions are aimed at guiding the operation of the social system, e.g., when he is voting or serving on a jury). The question should instead refer to principles of interpersonal ethics: why should an egoist care about honesty or about non-initiation of force?

While this distinction is implied by Rand's discussions of rights, she never discussed it explicitly; so Long's misinterpretation of Rand on this point—which is shared by many other commentators who have written about her view of rights¹⁶—is understandable. However, it is nonetheless a misinterpretation; and it is this misinterpretation that causes Long to see a Kantian strand in Rand's ethics.

Long quotes three passages from Rand which allegedly exhibit the Kantian strand; but all three are written in a context in which the discussion is about the organization of a social system, not about how an individual should behave.

The first passage, at the start of section VII (pp. 35–36), is from "The Wreckage of the Consensus," a discussion of military conscription, and in that passage Rand criticizes those who defend military conscription by the statement that "rights impose obligations."¹⁷ Rand is arguing that a social system should be organized to enforce consistency, demanding of each person that he respect the rights of others in return for having his own rights recognized and respected; and further, that this should be the *only* obligation that a social system enforces.

There is nothing Kantian in this argument. A society that enforces consistency in respecting people's rights can be justified by what Long calls the "Hobbesian" approach. It is in every person's self-interest to live in a society that enforces such consistency; both because in such a society his own rights will be enforced, and because other people, as a result of their rights being enforced, will be able to be productive and therefore to provide him with the benefits of trade.

The second passage is from Galt's speech, aimed at the leaders of Mr. Thompson's government and stating that they can't claim the sanction of reason.¹⁸ Rand is arguing that leaders of a coercive social system can't claim the sanction of reason, since by declaring that men are irrational animals, they define their own character; that a coercive social system attempts to exist in defiance of reality, since reality requires men to act on the judgment of their own individual minds, while a coercive system forces them to act against it; and therefore, that a coercive social system is not suitable for human life.

The clearest indication that Rand in this passage was referring to a coercive social system, rather than to individual acts of force, comes in the sentence immediately following the end of Long's quote: "You place him in a world where the price of his life is the surrender of all the virtues required by life—and death by a process of gradual destruction is all that you and your system will achieve, when death is made to be the ruling power, the winning argument in a society of men."¹⁹

The third passage (quoted towards the end of section VII, p. 39) is also from Galt's speech, stating the basic justification of rights. Rand is arguing that rationality, independence, and productivity are right for man, if he is to live on earth; therefore, he has a right to live rationally, independently and productively—i.e., a society, to be suitable for human life, must leave him free to live that way.

I do agree with Long that similar-sounding arguments, if applied to interpersonal ethics—i.e., to guiding the individual's actions towards others—would be Kantian; and I agree that such arguments would be committing the fallacy Long points out. However, those are not the arguments Rand was making.

5.2. Survival and interpersonal ethics

The basic reason why principles of interpersonal ethics are justified, by the standard of survival, is because of the existential role of acting on principle, as discussed above. This is the argument Rand uses in her response, quoted by Long, to Peikoff's hypothetical fake-gold-shares fraud.²⁰

While Rand's discussion of this example focuses on the chances of being caught, that is not the entire justification for interpersonal honesty. A more basic justification is the great benefits one gains from interacting with others by reason and trade—existential benefits, as well as psychological benefits of visibility. These benefits are lost to someone who chooses deceit as his way of dealing with people. Such a person will be able to deal with people only to the extent that they don't actively integrate their knowledge and so are unlikely to catch his contradictions. But it is

precisely the people who think and integrate most actively from whom one is likely to gain the greatest values; so, in Rand's words, even if he "wins all the battles" by not getting caught, he will still "lose the war," because he has limited himself to dealing with the people from whom he is likely to gain the least value, material as well as psychological.

This is the answer to Long's objection that Rand's argument would apply as well to lying to defend oneself from criminals, and to Long's analogies of Francisco D'Anconia and of the undercover cop. Someone who lies to defend himself from criminals is lying to people who have already chosen force rather than reason and trade as their way of dealing with him, so he is already unable to gain value from them. If he lives on the principle of engaging in deceit only against such people, he can deal by reason and trade with all people who are willing to deal with him that way and gain the values he can gain by trade with them. This is the essential difference between Francisco D'Anconia, or the undercover cop, and the con-man in Peikoff's example.

I believe the above provides a conclusive argument why *habitual* dishonesty, or initiation of force, are detrimental to one's survival. Some more argument is needed to demonstrate why a *single* act of dishonesty or force is detrimental, for a person who generally does act on the correct principles. Here, there are two separate questions:

1. If a person generally lives by the principle of non initiation of force, but is confronted with an abnormal "lifeboat" situation, in which his life depends on initiating force, is it wrong for him to do so?
2. If a person generally lives by the principles of honesty and non-initiation of force, why is it wrong for him to act against these principles in a normal situation just once, if he's really unlikely to be caught that one time?

On question 1, I agree with Long that the conclusion is inescapable that in such cases, by survival as the standard, it is *not* wrong to initiate force. But contrary to Long, I don't see that this represents a problem for this view or that Rand would have wanted to rule out such exceptions.

Long is correct that "Rand says nothing about whether in emergencies it is permissible to sacrifice others to oneself;" she says nothing on this question one way or the other. We can only speculate about why she doesn't, but I think the most plausible hypothesis is that these types of emergency situations—in which one's life depends on attacking others—are so rare that Rand did not consider them even worth discussing. Such situations are extremely rare even among emergencies. The type of situations Rand discussed in "The Ethics of Emergencies"²¹—situations in which one can save another person's life during an emergency—are also uncommon, but at least they are the sort of situation in which each of us has some reasonable probability of finding himself once or twice in his life; in contrast, I doubt if any reader of this paper has ever been, will ever be, or knows anyone who has ever been or will ever be, in a kill-or-be-killed emergency situation. It is still true, however, that on Rand's view

the principles of interpersonal ethics are justified by the normal context of life, in which one's chances of survival are greatly enhanced by dealing with others by reason and trade; they do not apply in those extremely rare circumstances that are outside this context.

On question 2, it is not the existential role of principles, but their psychological role, which is central. The existential role of principles to survival applies in the long run, and might not be negated by an isolated violation of the principle. In contrast, the role of principles in maintaining self-esteem is *immediate*, and depends on *total* consistency in following the principle. Once a person has formed his principles and has fully understood their role in promoting his long-range survival, any violation of them will not only negate their contribution to maintaining his self-esteem, but will reverse it; these same principles will now lead him to evaluate his own actions—and, consequently, his own person—as unworthy. If the violation of the principle is isolated, and minor, then the damage to his self-esteem will be reversible; but his ability to act and achieve his goals will be impaired, at least in the short run, and he will have to spend significant time and energy on restoring his self-esteem. More commonly, he will protect his sense of self-esteem by evading his principles and rationalizing his action, thus making it likely that the violation of the principle will become habitual, and eventually have the existential consequences discussed by Rand in the fake-gold-shares example.

This is what lends plausibility to Long's objection that "I challenge anyone to convince himself that [fear of the practical consequences of deceit] is the reason Howard Roark does not cheat his customers." (p. 44) Of course, it would be absurd to imagine Roark, after meeting with a new customer, sitting and pondering the question of whether to cheat that customer, deciding that he would probably have trouble remembering which lies he has told to whom, and therefore deciding to deal honestly. Having formed the proper principles, Roark—or any other honest person, fictional or real-life—has no need to consider the question anew for each case; his immediate reason for acting honestly is that he has accepted the principle. So acting against it would be of great psychological harm to him and even seriously considering doing so would be against his character. But I, for one, find nothing counter-intuitive in saying that Roark's reason for accepting the principle of honesty in the first place is his understanding of the great benefit to his life of dealing with people by reason and by trade, and of the risks involved in trying to deal with people by force or fraud instead.

A person forming strong principles, then, has formed his own character so that violating these principles will cause him psychological harm, and so, in effect, *created* a situation in which even a single violation will be self-destructive. The alternative—not forming these principles in the first place—is even more self-destructive. When taking into account both man's existential and psychological requirements, it is clear that the only course consistent with long-range survival is forming the proper moral principles *and consistently following them*.

6. Morally risking or giving up one's life

In trying to demonstrate an inconsistency between Rand's explicit ethics and the ethics implicit in her novels, Long cites the example, from *Atlas Shrugged*, of John Galt deciding to commit suicide if necessary to keep Dagny from being tortured. (p. 44) This suggests that Rand can regard it as appropriate to take an action which risks or destroys one's physical survival. Other examples of such actions might be: a person risking his life to escape a dictatorship; or a person who, consigned to a permanently vegetative state because of some illness or injury, decides to have the life-support machines disconnected. Are such examples inconsistent with survival as the standard?

In understanding such cases, we need to consider the importance for man's survival—both existential and psychological, as discussed above—of forming values. All of the above are cases in which a person is acting on values which, in general, *support* human survival; which, at the time that they were formed, were likely to help his survival; but which are now leading him to risk, or even certainly give up, his life.

The point discussed above regarding moral principles applies, even more strongly, to one's deepest concrete values. Once formed, acting to achieve these values becomes the basis of one's happiness. Acting in a way that clearly and strongly goes against these values will inevitably lead to the most profound unhappiness, losing the motivation to any further actions to sustain one's life, and quite likely dying soon in any case. The people in the above examples, therefore—given their situations *and given the values they have already formed*—are not actually acting against their own survival; they are either (in the case of the person escaping a dictatorship) choosing the action that has some chance of making long-term survival possible, over the action which, by the psychological damage it will cause, will certainly kill them; or (in the cases of Galt and of the man turning off the life-support machines) acting in a situation in which long-term survival has become impossible.

The crucial point is that forming strongly held values might, in some rare cases, lead one to take actions leading to death; but in general, such strong values are much more likely to greatly *enhance* one's chances of survival, both by consistently guiding one's actions towards goals that help one's survival, and through their contribution to self-esteem and to happiness. Suppose a young person said to himself: "I don't want to find any work that I strongly care about; I don't want to develop any deep personal relationships with anyone; I don't want to develop any strong values, and this way I'll avoid the risk of facing any situations, in the future, in which my values will conflict with survival." I'm sure the reader has met many such people (though they probably were not quite as articulate as described here). Such a person will live his life with no purpose to guide his actions, and with no motivation for using his mind. Such a person's rational faculty will gradually deteriorate; he may be driven to various kinds of self-destructive activities to escape from the boredom of his life; and, in the long run, will be much *less* likely to survive.

Forming strong values, therefore, can be seen as involving a certain risk; but

from the standard of survival, it is a risk well worth taking.

7. Survival and constitutive means

In the previous sections, I have argued for survival as the standard of value; and have explained, in outline, how the values and virtues which Objectivism advocates are derived from this standard. Long, in contrast, holds that virtues are not merely instrumental means towards survival, valued because of their consequences in promoting that end; they are constitutive means towards flourishing, valued because they are themselves *part* of that end.

In this section, I will point out an important grain of truth in this view. I will indicate why the distinction between instrumental and constitutive means isn't nearly as fundamental as Long believes it to be; and, consequently, where Rand's "survival" approach and the Aristotelian "flourishing" approach can find common ground.

Rand defined life as "a process of self-sustaining and self-generated action."²² Life is not some goal beyond the actions which sustain it; it *consists* of the collection of actions, which sustain the possibility of their own continued performance. For an organism to survive means nothing more or less than to continue taking the same actions.

This is obvious regarding the biological actions and faculties of animals. An animal breathes, has blood circulate through its body, is conscious of its surroundings, moves to find food and run from predators, etc.; all these actions evolved because they contribute to the animal's survival. However, for the animal to survive means nothing more or less than for it to continue breathing, moving, being conscious, having blood circulation, etc.

Man is different from other animals in that many aspects of his identity, relating to his conscious values and actions, develop, not by evolution, but by his own choices. The same principle, however, applies here also. The values and principles that a person has formed, the character traits he has developed, are part of his identity as a living organism; the actions he takes based on them are living actions, just as much as his lower-level biological actions; they are "self-sustaining, self-generated actions," aimed at man's continued ability to take these same actions—i.e., at maintaining his own character, values, and principles—as well as his ability to take all of his other, lower-level living actions.

In a crucial sense, then, asking "what if you could survive better by being irrational, or living without purpose?" is a senseless question; it is equivalent to asking "what if you could survive better by being unconscious, not breathing, not moving, and having no blood circulation?" All of these aspects of a man's nature have developed (in the second question, by evolution; in the first question, by the man's own choice) because of their contribution to survival; but once developed, they themselves become part of survival, and the idea of surviving without them becomes senseless.

On this point, a crucial distinction must be recognized—analogueous to the

distinction made in philosophy of mind—between the first-person and the third-person perspective.²³ From a first-person perspective, one's own character and values are not experienced as means towards the end of survival (except, perhaps, in some very unusual situations, e.g., when one is experiencing extreme sadness or despondence as a result of a great personal loss). A rational person, while acting on his principles, does not experience his action as motivated by the existential consequences of the principles (e.g., as noted previously, a rational person does not, when an opportunity to cheat other people presents itself, consciously consider whether to try to do so, and then decide not to by an argument similar to Rand's argument about the fake gold shares). Rather, one's character, values and principles are experienced as part of oneself, and as ends in themselves. From the third-person perspective, however, we can prove—as I have argued throughout this paper—that the basis of all rational values is the goal of survival.

The same is true of vegetative actions as well. A person does not experience his own breathing as aimed at providing his cells with oxygen; he simply experiences it as an essential part of his life. Only from the third-person perspective, by studying man's body, we discover that breathing is, in fact, aimed at that end. The difference is that in the case of man's values and character, to the extent that they were chosen by him rather than adopted passively from his culture, he does need some awareness of their contribution to survival in order to develop them in the first place; or in order to choose, when he becomes philosophically and morally reflective, which of the values he has earlier adopted from his culture to continue to accept and which to reject. This awareness, however, is not—and, if these values are to fulfill their psychological role, can't be—part of one's conscious first-person experience while making concrete decisions.

I think this is what Rand meant in her statement that “[Reason, purpose and self-esteem are] the three values which, together, are the means to *and the realization of* one's ultimate value, one's own life.”²⁴ (Italics mine.) Rand's statement can be expanded as follows: man values reason, purpose and self-esteem—as well as his more concrete values—because they are the *means* to his life; and because he values them, they become, and are experienced as, the *realization* of his life.

On this point, then, the Objectivist view, and the Aristotelian view as stated by Long, are in essential agreement. Where they differ—and where Rand's unique contribution to the issue lies—is in the method by which we determine *what* values can be seen as part of, or the realization of, man's life. On the Aristotelian view, the standard is whatever seems plausible to men of practical wisdom, with no further justification required. On Rand's view, in contrast, since survival is the standard, we must justify all values by demonstrating their direct or indirect contribution to physical survival; only after this has been established, we become justified in regarding these values as themselves part of what survival means for a human being, making them an aspect of the good life, or of man's life *qua* man.

Notes

1. Terminological note: I believe “flourishing” is a concept that can be used legitimately in an Objectivist context, to mean a life with those values that are likely to promote long-term survival; the concepts of “flourishing,” “the good life,” or “man’s life qua man” can be used interchangeably. However, in order to clearly differentiate the Objectivist view from the Aristotelian view as stated by Long, I will use the term “flourishing” below as Long uses it, and use the terms “the good life” or “man’s life qua man” when using the concept consistently with the Objectivist view.
2. For example, Douglas Rasmussen, in “Human Flourishing and the Appeal to Human Nature” (*Social Philosophy and Policy* 16 no. 1 (Winter 1999)) argues that identifying what flourishing consists of depends on identifying facts about human nature; that while the weighting of the various goods constituting human flourishing will vary among individuals, a list of generic goods can be made on the basis of human nature. However, while he lists the goods which he regards as constituents of human flourishing—e.g., Health, Intellectual Ability, Honor, Justice—he provides no argument as to why a human life would be better or more flourishing for having these goods, and obviously expects his readers to regard that as self-evident.
3. Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1142a 11–15.
4. For example, the industrial revolution has significantly changed, and enhanced, the role of reason in man’s survival, and, consequently, its role in the good life; see Peikoff’s discussion of this in Leonard Peikoff, *Objectivism: the Philosophy of Ayn Rand* (New York: New American Library—Dutton, 1991), p. 195.
5. Peikoff, *Objectivism: the Philosophy of Ayn Rand*, p. 216.
6. I thank David Kelley for this analogy.
7. For a detailed discussion of the value-significance of biological organs and processes, and of survival as the standard of value in biological processes, see Harry Binswanger, *The Biological Basis of Teleological Concepts* (Los Angeles: Ayn Rand Institute Press, 1990).
8. George Schaller, *The Serengeti Lion: A Study In Predator-Prey Relations* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 360. This example, and its relevance to the issue of survival and flourishing, were pointed out to me by Irfan Khawaja.
9. Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* (New York: New American Library—Dutton, 1992; 35th anniversary edition), p. 944.
10. *Ibid.*
11. For a discussion of the existential role of principles, see Leonard Peikoff’s discussion, quoted by Long, p. 62 n. 77. Long refers to this view of principles as “rule-egoist,” but this is a highly misleading term, suggesting a person holding a list of out-of-context rules to limit his actions. “Principled egoism” may be a more accurate term.
12. Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, p. 947.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 948.
14. Ayn Rand, “Art and Sense of Life,” in *The Romantic Manifesto* (New York: New American Library, 1971), p. 38.
15. For more detail on this, see Eyal Mozes, “Deriving Rights from Egoism: Machan vs. Rand,” *Reason Papers* no. 17 (1992).
16. e.g., Tibor Machan, *Individuals and their Rights* (La Salle: Open Court Publishing, 1989).

17. Ayn Rand, “The Wreckage of the Consensus,” in *Capitalism, the Unknown Ideal* (New York: New American Library, 1967) p. 227; the context is made clear in the paragraph immediately preceding the one Long quotes: “One of the notions used by all sides to justify the draft, is that ‘rights impose obligations.’ Obligations, to whom?—and imposed, by whom? ... Logically, that notion is a contradiction: since the only proper function of a government is to protect man’s rights, it cannot claim title to his life in exchange for that protection.”
18. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, p. 1023.
19. Ibid.
20. Leonard Peikoff, “My Thirty Years with Ayn Rand,” in Ayn Rand et. al., *The Voice of Reason* (New York: New American Library, 1989), p. 340; quoted by Long p. 42.
21. Ayn Rand, “The Ethics of Emergencies” in *The Virtue of Selfishness* (New York: New American Library, 1964), pp. 43–49.
22. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, p. 939.
23. I thank Irfan Khawaja for drawing my attention to this distinction.
24. Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness*, p. 25.

Author's Response

Foundations and Flourishing A Reply to Miller and Mozes

Roderick T. Long

Augustine describes the learning of human language as though the child had come into a strange land and did not understand the language of that land; i.e., as if he already had a language, only not that one. Or again: as if the child could already think, only not yet speak.

— Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* I. 32

A living being has an attachment to itself, for there must be a standard by which all other things are judged. ... Since I treat my own welfare as the standard for all my actions, I am concerned for myself above everything else. ... Every living thing has an initial attachment to its own constitution; but a human being's constitution is a rational one, and so a human being's attachment is to himself not qua living being but qua rational being. For he is dear to himself in respect of what makes him human.

— Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Letter* 121

One of the major issues within contemporary epistemology is the dispute between *foundationalism* and *coherentism* as rival accounts of the grounds of knowledge and justification. One of the major issues within the Randian philosophical milieu¹ is the dispute between proponents of (bare) *survival* and proponents of *flourishing* as rival candidates for the ultimate good on which ethics depends. I think these two issues are closely related, and that the case for flourishing depends on recognizing the error of foundationalism.

More specifically, in "Reason and Value: Aristotle versus Rand," I argued that Ayn Rand's rejection of Aristotle's coherentist, testimony-based epistemology in favor of her own version of foundationalist empiricism has two undesirable consequences: first, it opens the door to a corrosive skepticism that Rand rightly wishes to avoid; and second, it forces Rand into defending an instrumental survival-oriented conception of the relation of morality to self-interest, even though a constitutive, flourishing-oriented relation along Aristotelian lines would more closely match her

basic ethical insights. Accordingly, I suggested that Rand's Objectivist philosophy would benefit from revision in an Aristotelian direction.

In their careful and thought-provoking responses, Fred Miller and Eyal Mozes mount both a defense and an offense. Their defensive strategy is to provide interpretations of Rand that will allow her theory to escape my objections. Their offensive strategy is to argue that Aristotelian coherentism suffers from weaknesses to which Randian foundationalism is immune. I maintain that both strategies fail.

I. Spheres of Influence

For Rand, all knowledge must be traced back to its basis in sense-perception. One of my arguments against this doctrine may be summarized as follows:

1. We all know the earth is round.
2. Yet most of us cannot ground that belief in sensory evidence.
3. Therefore, a belief need not be grounded in sensory evidence to count as knowledge.

Miller responds (pp. 76–77) by suggesting that Rand would question both premises of this argument. First, he maintains, Rand would deny that people really know that the earth is round unless they can defend their belief by appeal to sensory evidence; instead, they only “kinda-know” it. This rejection of (1) seems to push us toward the yawning abyss of skepticism; but Miller pulls us back by challenging (2) as well.

Miller's critique of (2) is twofold. First, he maintains that Rand could plausibly retort that we *are*, in fact, in a position to establish the roundness of the earth by appeal to our own perceptual experience without any need to rely on others' testimony; and he uses two arguments from Aristotle to support this point. Second, he claims that, for Rand, the requirement that knowledge be grounded in perceptual experience can be satisfied by an appeal to *other* people's experience rather than our own.

I believe neither of the arguments from Aristotle that Miller offers on behalf of the roundness of the earth succeeds. Aristotle's first argument is that the shadow seen on the moon during lunar eclipses is always curved, so it must be cast by a round object. That seems a plausible inference, but it does not license the assumption that the round object in question is the *earth*; nor does it show that the round object is a *sphere*, rather than a flat disk. Aristotle's second argument is that there are stars visible in Egypt that are not visible in Europe, which would not be the case if the earth were flat. This too is a plausible inference, but all it suggests is that the earth's surface is *convex*; it hardly shows it to be a sphere rather than, say, an inverted bowl. Aristotle's arguments thus fail to narrow the field; they do not rule out the alternative explanations offered by rival scientific theories of his day.² (Even if the second argument were successful, it would not be an example of a purely perceptually-based argument independent of testimony, because Aristotle had never been to Egypt personally and so was relying on the reports of others.)

I remain unconvinced, therefore, by Miller's claim that most of us are in a good position to declare, *on the basis of perceptual evidence alone*, that the earth is round. However, Miller thinks Rand does not actually need to say this in order to show that our beliefs about the shape of the earth are justified. Instead, he suggests, she would grant that we can legitimately accept the earth's roundness on the basis of scientists' testimony, but *only* so long as "one has good reason to believe that the requisite observations have been made and the scientific method applied in a conscientious manner." (p. 77) But precisely what I am questioning is whether one could have good reason to believe such a thing except against the background of the reputable testimony of others—what I've been calling *endoxa*, following Aristotle.³ On the Aristotelian view, it is a mistake to think of the individual knower as a kind of alien explorer, arriving among us already possessed of a language and a theory of the world. According to the alien-explorer model, the individual knower treats the utterances of others simply as more data to be used as material for inferences. What people tell him will be accepted only to the extent that they have proven themselves to be reliable sources of information in the past. But our reliance on the testimony of others goes much deeper than the alien-explorer model would allow.⁴ The individual's very judgments of reliability are themselves inevitably going to be made against the background of a picture of the world whose formation and justification themselves depend crucially upon on testimony. It is only on the basis of such testimony that he can have any reason to believe that scientists are using the scientific method, or that this method is generally reliable. And this reliance on testimony goes all the way down to the roots of his conceptual framework and to his childhood acquisition of language itself. There is no way out of the circle of *endoxa*.

In the absence of *endoxa*, then, we simply do not have sufficient perceptual warrant, whether direct or indirect, to accept the conclusion that the earth is round (or any number of other common-sense propositions). If my knowledge of the shape of the earth is only "kinda-knowledge," then kinda-knowledge is all we have or can have. We must therefore choose between rejecting Rand's foundationalist empiricism or accepting skepticism.

If we were alien explorers this might be a tough choice. But we are already in the position of making and believing the judgments that presuppose the reliability of testimony; we are already inside the circle of *endoxa*. The worldview we've built up on the basis of *endoxa* is one that seems true to us, and it is the skeptic who must shoulder the burden of proving that things are not as they seem.

II. Perception and Judgment

In my original essay I described Rand's version of foundationalism as both *narrow* (i.e., knowledge must rest on foundations that comprise a fairly small subset of our total set of beliefs) and *classical* (i.e., these foundational beliefs must be *indefeasible*—absolutely certain and not subject to correction). While I am critical of narrow foundationalism *per se*, I think the prospects of a *classical* version of narrow

foundationalism are especially bleak, since the number of indefeasible beliefs is far too small to ground any substantial structure of knowledge.

But does Rand regard the foundations of knowledge as indefeasible? Certainly this seems a natural way of interpreting Leonard Peikoff's characterization of her view: "the facts of perception ... are the self-evident and the incontestable, by reference to which we validate all later knowledge."⁵ Miller argues, however, that my critique of Rand's epistemology is off target because it does not take into account two central features of her theory: a) her distinction between perception and perceptual judgment, and b) her doctrine that knowledge is contextual.

I take Miller's argument to run as follows: For Rand, perception provides the raw material of knowledge: the data of the senses.⁶ It is these data that are indefeasible ("self-evident" and "incontestable"); but these data, not yet being conceptualized, do not yet constitute instances of *belief* or *knowledge*, and so do not count as indefeasible foundations in the sense I was worrying about. It is rather the perceptual judgments we form on the basis of perceptual data that are the foundations of knowledge; but these perceptual judgments are fallible and defeasible. They can be described as certain only relative to a particular context of knowledge, and are subject to revision as our knowledge expands. Hence, Miller concludes, I should not categorize Rand as a classical foundationalist; and to the extent that my charge (that Rand is committed, despite herself, to skepticism) rests on the assumption that Randian foundations must be indefeasible, that charge is mistaken.

Let me begin by noting that I take the narrowness of Rand's foundationalism to pose a sufficient threat of skepticism, apart from the additional issue of indefeasibility; so even if Miller is right, I take the substance of my critique to remain unaffected. Let us examine, however, Rand's views on perceptual judgments and on contextualism, considering the former in this section, and the latter in the next.

Perceptions are self-evident and incontestable; but they are not perceptual judgments. Does this mean that perceptions are not propositional? If so, what is it, exactly, that is self-evident and incontestable? If I perceive a cat, and this perception is self-evident and incontestable, one might suppose this means that it is self-evident and incontestable *that there is a cat in front of me*. But that is presumably a perceptual *judgment*, and so fallible (I might be misidentifying a cat figurine as a cat). What, then, does it mean to say that my perception of the cat is self-evident and incontestable?

For Rand, perception is awareness of entities, not of the truth of propositions. Presumably she would say that when I perceive a cat, what I am aware of is not *that there is a cat*, or *that there is a cat-shaped object*, or *that I am being appeared to in a catlike manner*; rather, what I am aware of is *the cat itself*. Now I agree that perception is awareness of the cat itself. What I wish to question is whether such perception can be meaningfully distinguished from perceptual judgment.

Consider the case of nonhuman animals, which on Rand's view possess the capacity for perception but not for perceptual judgment. Suppose two dogs, Snoopy

and Marmaduke, perceive Garfield, a cat. It could easily happen that Snoopy recognizes Garfield as a cat, while Marmaduke (perhaps misled by all the cat figurines scattered across the lawn) does not. It's tempting to analyze this case as one in which Snoopy forms the perceptual judgment *there is a cat in front of me* while the less alert Marmaduke forms, at best, the judgment *there is a cat-shaped object in front of me*. But Rand cannot accept this analysis of the case, since dogs cannot make perceptual judgments. So wherein do the two dogs differ? They both perceive Garfield; they both discriminate him as a distinct entity. Rand won't say that Snoopy *believes* the object is a cat and Marmaduke *believes* otherwise, since belief requires concepts; yet she must surely grant that Snoopy has some sort of awareness that Marmaduke lacks.

One natural way to describe the difference is to say that Snoopy is aware of Garfield *as* a cat, while Marmaduke is aware of Garfield only *as*, say, a small fuzzy object up ahead. (Recall the example, in my first essay, of seeing Figure 1 (p. 15) *as* a word rather than *as* an assemblage of lines and boxes.) But it's difficult to see what the difference is between perceiving an object *as* a cat and judging that an object *is* a cat. Something like perceptual judgment seems to be involved already at the perceptual level.⁷ Now Miller or Rand might retort that it is only *implicit* judgments that occur at the perceptual level. But what exactly is an implicit judgment? If to say that a perception involves an implicit judgment is to say no more than that a perception is such that a reasoning intellect *could* form the appropriate judgment on the basis of it, then it is hard to see how creatures lacking such intellects could differ in their awareness in virtue of such perceptions.⁸

This leaves it unclear exactly *what* it is in perception that is self-evident and incontestable for Rand. It can't be seeing-Garfield-as-a-cat, because that is fallible. (A dog might mistakenly see a figurine as a cat.) So is it just seeing-Garfield? But that seems to have no content. If I remove from my perception of Garfield all the descriptions under which I might see him—as a cat, as a three-dimensional object, as an object smaller than a house, as one object rather than two, *etc.*—then all that is self-evident in my perception is the awareness of a bare *something* (or *some things*). But then this perceptual core has no real content, and Rand's claims for it collapse into vacuity. What is the point of calling the evidence of the senses self-evident and incontestable, if what is self-evident and incontestable in them tells us precisely nothing?⁹

I originally called Rand a classical foundationalist, because she claimed that knowledge rests on self-evident and incontestable foundations. In doing so I was assuming that this claim was intended to be more than vacuous. (And surely it was indeed so *intended*.) Now I acknowledge that the evidence Miller points to gives us good reason to think that Rand's foundationalism is not classical after all; but that is because it gives us reason to think that Rand's foundationalism is too incoherent to be classified as either classical or not classical. Rand intends to distinguish two sorts of foundational items, one defeasible (perceptual judgments) and the other indefeasible (perceptions), but my Garfield example suggests that she has no defensible way

of distinguishing the two. Whenever we perceive a thing, we always perceive it *as* something or other; and in perceiving it *as* something or other we have already accomplished everything needed to count as having made a perceptual judgment. Within perceptual experience there lurks no non-propositional core to be found once everything propositional has been stripped away; in setting aside perceptual judgment, we set aside perception itself.

If my analysis of Rand's theory of perception is correct, then Rand cannot consistently treat her epistemological foundations either as defeasible *or* as indefeasible, and so her foundationalism cannot count as either classical or not. Miller's attempt to rescue Rand's theory from the charge of *skepticism* only lands it in the still less desirable condition of *incoherence*.

III. Contextualism and Truth

The second aspect of Rand's theory of knowledge to which Miller thinks I fail to do justice is her *contextualism*. In my original essay I suggested there were three main options in epistemology. First, one can have high standards both for what counts as knowledge and for what counts as objective reality; this approach, which I ascribed to Rand, makes the gap between knowledge and reality too hard to bridge, and commits its proponents to skepticism. Second, one can try to bridge the gap by lowering one's standards for what counts as objective reality; this leads to some form of subjectivism or idealism. Third, one can try to bridge the gap by lowering one's standards for what counts as knowledge; this is the Aristotelian approach, which I've been recommending.

In response, Miller suggests a fourth option: "Rand proposes an alternative approach, which requires high standards for [both] reality and knowledge but applies these standards only within a context." (p. 78) A conclusion can be certain within its original context, yet subject to revision within a wider context.

I am not certain how this solution is supposed to ward off the threat of skepticism. By making conclusions revisable it avoids the problems involved with *indefeasibility*; but my charge that Rand's theory is vulnerable to skepticism is not based on any claim of the form "if conclusions are defeasible then they must not be certain." Rather, my claim is that if conclusions have to be based on sense-perception alone, without the help of *endoxa*, then such conclusions—defeasible or indefeasible, certain or uncertain—are going to be too scanty in content to support most of what Rand thinks we know.

In any case, Rand's contextualism raises problems of its own. What does it mean to say that a given conclusion counts as knowledge in one context but no longer as knowledge in another context? If by "knowledge" Rand means no more than *justification*, then the claim is plausible enough, but her use of the word "knowledge" will then count as highly eccentric, since a belief can be justified and yet later turn out to be false, whereas *knowledge* is ordinarily understood as entailing truth; the skeptic could fairly charge Rand with changing the subject.¹⁰ If, on the other hand, it is

knowledge in the truth-entailing sense that is supposed to be contextual, then the same proposition will be true for one person and false for another;¹¹ but this is a relativist thesis radically at odds with Rand's insistence on the primacy of existence over consciousness.¹² (It is also no longer an alternative to my three options, but rather a version of the second.)

Either Rand's contextualism makes *truth* context-relative, or it only makes *justification* context-relative. If the former, then Rand escapes skepticism only by renouncing objective reality. This seems an unpromising strategy. If the latter, then my original question arises once more: how does making justification contextual avoid the problem that Randian justification still requires grounding our beliefs in perceptual foundations that, as I have argued, cannot bear their weight without the assistance of *endoxa*?

IV. Rights: Political, Not Ethical?

Miller's defense focuses on Rand's account of theoretical rationality; that of Mozes focuses on her account of practical rationality.¹³ In my original essay I claimed that Rand's account of the relation between morality and self-interest is too Hobbesian and instrumentalist to offer a successful answer to the central question of Plato's *Republic*: why should we care about other people's rights in cases where we could get away with violating them?

Mozes first suggests that I have misworded the question, and then, after offering a rewording of the question, tries to answer it. His attempted answer is of more importance than his rewording, but let me say something briefly about the latter before turning to the former.

I asked Plato's question as a question about why egoists should care about other people's *rights*. This, says Mozes, is the wrong question: "Rand didn't use the concept of rights as a concept of interpersonal ethics, relevant to guiding an individual's actions; they are principles guiding the organization of a social system." Instead of asking why an egoist should care about rights, then, Mozes says the right question to ask is "why should an egoist care about honesty, or about non-initiation of force." (p. 92)

This seems to me a distinction without a difference. On Rand's view, "rights can be violated only by physical force."¹⁴ Thus *non-initiation of force* and *respecting people's rights* seem to come to the same thing, and so respecting rights *is* a matter of interpersonal ethics rather than of social organization. The question of social organization concerns the mechanism for *protecting* people's rights; this goes beyond interpersonal ethics, because individuals are under no general obligation to *protect* one another's rights. Thus rights-protection is a matter of politics, not interpersonal ethics. But *respect* for rights *is* required of individuals, since it comes to the same thing as non-initiation of force, which Mozes grants is a requirement of interpersonal ethics. I do not have to rescue every victim of assault, but I have a responsibility not to commit any assaults myself. Moreover, Rand makes clear that rights are prior to the

state. So I am not convinced that Rand confines rights to the sociopolitical and excludes them from the ethical sphere.

It is important to Mozes that rights be sociopolitical rather than ethical, because he invokes this distinction to critique my claim that Rand on occasion flirts with a Kantian justification of rights. He writes: “I do agree with Long that similar-sounding arguments, if applied to interpersonal ethics—i.e., to guiding the individual’s actions towards others—would be Kantian; and I agree that such arguments would be committing the fallacy Long points out. However, those are not the arguments Rand was making.” (p. 93) But in the passages I cited, Rand seems to be primarily concerned to show that we are obligated to *respect* (not to protect) others’ rights, so her arguments do seem to be aimed at establishing rights as a principle of interpersonal ethics. If this is so, then the condition has been met that Mozes agrees would show that Rand’s arguments are Kantian (and, more importantly, fallacious) after all.

My main concern, however, is not with Rand’s occasional forays into Kantian rationalism, but with her more pervasive endorsement of Hobbesian instrumentalism. It is to Mozes’ discussion of this issue that I now turn.

V. Indirect Egoism

In “Reason and Value: Aristotle versus Rand” I considered two interpretations of Rand’s claim that “man’s life *qua* man” is the standard of morality. On the Aristotelian interpretation, man’s life *qua* man refers to an objective state of flourishing, of which morality is an intrinsic component. On the Hobbesian interpretation, man’s life *qua* man refers to bare survival, to which morality is merely a strategic instrumental means. I argued that although the Aristotelian view is suggested by her fiction, the considered view in her philosophical writings appears to be the Hobbesian one;¹⁵ I further argued that a Hobbesian justification of moral principles could not be adequate, because there would always be reason to violate such principles if one could get away with it.¹⁶

Mozes responds by arguing that Rand’s version of egoism is *indirect*: rather than choosing each individual action according to whether it maximizes one’s chances at survival, one adopts a consistent commitment to moral values because such a commitment is ultimately a more reliable long-run strategy for ensuring survival.¹⁷ Thus my dichotomy between flourishing and bare survival poses a false alternative; man’s life *qua* man is neither survival nor flourishing but “a life with those values that are likely to promote long-term survival” or “those principles of action which man needs to act on *in order to survive*.”

On Rand’s view, “survival *qua* man” is a certain kind of survival, not just staying alive as such; it is survival with reasonable physical health, reason, purpose, self-esteem, and the other values However, the qualification “*qua* man” is a strategic constraint on the means to the end of staying alive; the criterion for what “survival

qua man” consists in is that these are the values which can be demonstrated to contribute to one’s long-term survival. (p. 91)

I do not believe that Mozes’ third option is stable; in practice, it must slide either into the Hobbesian or into the Aristotelian approach.¹⁸ (To the extent that Mozes’ third option is accurate as an interpretation of Rand, it illustrates the unresolved tensions in Rand’s own thought.) Suppose I want to maximize my chances at long-term survival, so I follow Mozes’ advice and cultivate in myself a commitment to moral values. After I have done this, there arises a particular situation in which I notice that I could better promote my survival by violating one of those values.¹⁹ In Mozes’ terms (p. 96), these are values “which, at the time they were formed, were likely to help [my] survival; but which are now leading [me] to risk, or even certainly give up, [my] life.” The question is which standard should govern my choice: my survival, or my moral values? If the answer is survival, then indirect egoism has collapsed into direct egoism, and the door is open to justifying all sorts of morally horrific conduct given the right circumstances. If the answer is my moral values, then it is no longer survival that I care about, but flourishing, so if survival is my self-interest then I have ceased to be an egoist, and Rand’s self-interested argument for acting on principle is less a version of ethical egoism than a *reductio* of it (offering egoistic reasons for renouncing egoism).

Mozes’ text provides some evidence that he inclines toward the direct-egoist account. He tells us that “so long as one is human and acts in a way that can rationally be expected to help him stay alive (long enough), one is surviving qua man.” (p. 92) Hence if one’s life depends on abandoning a moral principle, one should abandon it—for example, killing an innocent person in a lifeboat situation: “the principles of interpersonal ethics are justified by the normal context of life, in which one’s chances of survival are greatly enhanced by dealing with others by reason and trade; they do not apply in those extremely rare circumstances that are outside this context.” (pp. 94–95) Such an interpretation makes the egoist no more than a fair-weather friend of virtue. This result is undesirable for three reasons. First, such an ideal is too uninspiring to motivate and maintain one’s commitment to virtue even in ordinary cases, but will most likely undermine it. Second, it is implausible as a reconstruction of the motivations of Rand’s fictional characters, whose virtue remains untarnished in unusual, life-threatening situations. Third, it would license, as morally permissible, actions that we know are morally impermissible, such as torturing an innocent person to death in order to escape such treatment oneself.²⁰ In Aristotle’s words, “There are some things that cannot be compelled, but one should sooner accept death, undergoing the greatest terrors; for indeed, the things that ‘compelled’ Alkmaion in Euripides’ play to commit matricide are obviously absurd.”²¹

In any case, most of what Mozes says tells against his accepting the direct-egoist account. Instead, he maintains that one is justified in sticking by the values that one adopted to further one’s survival, even when those values now place one’s

survival in jeopardy. How can this be reconciled with the recognition of survival as one's ultimate goal? Mozes offers two somewhat different arguments.

First, Mozes says that it is in our self-interest to cultivate in ourselves a passionate attachment to moral values, in order to keep ourselves motivated to keep pursuing survival.²² But once we have succeeded in cultivating such an attachment, then we will no longer be able to violate those values without heavy psychological costs. For example, we need a positive evaluation of ourselves—the ability to “bear our own survey,” in Hume’s phrase—in order to maintain our motivation; but the standard for positive self-evaluation must be man’s life *qua* man, so even occasional wrongdoing will undermine our self-esteem and thus damage our fitness for survival. “A person forming strong principles, then, has formed his own character so that violating these principles will cause him psychological harm, and so, in effect, *created* a situation in which even a single violation will be self-destructive.” (p. 95)

This answer seems psychologically plausible as far as it goes, but it does not provide a complete explanation of moral commitment. First, it suggests that if scientists were to develop a pill that would alter one’s psychology so as to make one’s self-esteem rest on usually-following-moral-rules rather than always-following-moral-rules, one would have no reason not to take it. But surely a virtuous person would not take such a pill.

Second, Mozes’ account does not fully account for John Galt’s threat (in *Atlas Shrugged*) to commit suicide rather than let Dagny Taggart be tortured. Mozes’ explanation seems to go like this: one of the values Galt has formed, in order to keep himself motivated to survive, is his love for Dagny. *Given* that value, a life in which he let Dagny be tortured would be unbearable for him, and he would lose his motivation to survive. Hence by committing suicide he would not be sacrificing long-term survival, since long-term survival is no longer an option in any case. But several considerations puzzle me here. First, surviving *forever* is not an option for mortal beings; so “long-term survival” can only be a comparative matter. But Galt will survive *longer* if he lets Dagny be tortured than if he commits suicide; so why doesn’t a concern for long-term survival counsel against suicide? Second, by Rand’s standards isn’t it irrational for Galt to allow himself to be guided by his emotions when he sees clearly that in this case they are frustrating his survival? And third, if Galt’s only reason for committing suicide is to avoid unbearable psychological suffering, then he ought to jump at the chance to let Dagny be tortured if he were to be offered an amnesia pill; but that hardly seems plausible.

Mozes wants to say that it is best for our survival that we commit ourselves to values that might conceivably conflict with our survival; but in that case we need a clearer statement of the relation between survival and self-interest. Suppose I get myself to care about flourishing more than about bare survival, because doing so is the best means to ensuring (indirectly) my bare survival. But now *which* is to be identified with my self-interest: flourishing, or bare survival?

If Rand says that my self-interest remains bare survival, then it seems she is

no longer an egoist, since what she is advising people to pursue is something distinct from, and potentially in conflict with, their self-interest. Of course Rand can say that this shift of focus is itself justified by self-interest; but this seems to make self-interest a mere ladder that one kicks away once one has climbed up it. The person who has inculcated the appropriate values in himself is now more interested in those values than in bare survival; so if survival is self-interest, then such a person is now subordinating the value of self-interest to other values, and cannot truthfully call himself an ethical egoist. He has given up egoism, albeit for egoist reasons; but the egoist reasons for which he gave it up are reasons he had *then*, not reasons he has *now*.²³

If Rand instead identifies flourishing with self-interest, then she can consistently preserve her claim to be an ethical egoist—but only at the cost of having to give up her claim to be resting all value on survival. Instead, the concept of self-interest will have no antecedently fixed content but must instead be constructed through practical deliberation. That would be fine by me; it’s essentially the view of Aristotle and the Stoics. But it is not the position Rand means to defend.

In addition to the indirect-egoist arguments we’ve been examining, Mozes offers a strikingly different argument, one that tries to make moral values constitutive of the end after all. Mozes says: “The values and principles that a person has formed, the character traits he has developed, are part of his identity as a living organism.” (p. 97) Hence maintaining oneself in existence involves maintaining these aspects of oneself in existence.²⁴

But surely maintaining oneself in existence cannot be a matter of maintaining *all* of my properties in existence; otherwise I would be forbidden to lose weight, or learn Arabic, or even get out of my chair. (And if I am wicked then I would be committed to maintaining my wickedness in existence also.) Such traits are not part of my “identity” in any essentialist sense.²⁵ So why should self-preservation involve only the preservation of *positive* traits? Nor can Mozes reply that the only traits I need to maintain are those that promote my bare survival, because the intent of his argument is to justify preserving values even when they do *not* promote bare survival.

In short, then, I do not think Mozes succeeds in rescuing Rand from the dilemma with which I presented her. Either moral values are worthwhile only for the sake of their contribution to bare survival, in which case it would be mindless rule-worship to adhere to moral values when one could get away with breaking them; or else moral values are worthwhile in their own right, and so survival is not the ultimate end.

VI. The Incoherence of Coherence?

So far I have discussed the defensive portion of Miller’s and Mozes’ strategies, i.e., their replies to my criticisms of Rand. Finally I come to their criticism of my own position. Just as I’ve been maintaining that Rand’s foundationalist empiricism makes knowledge too difficult (and so leads to skepticism), they maintain that a coherentist, testimony-based epistemology like the one I favor makes knowledge too

easy (and so licenses beliefs that are in fact unjustified). Miller, for example, writes: “Whether we can justifiably claim to know historical facts which we do not have the time to research ourselves depends upon whether we have a basic understanding of the methods of historical scholarship and whether we have good reason to believe the methods are applied in a rigorous and reliable manner. If we learn of evidence that historians are relying on bad evidence or are themselves falsifying and misusing evidence, we are not entitled to claim that we know such facts.” (p. 77)

It is certainly true that if we acquire positive reason to believe that sources are *unreliable* then we should reject their testimony; but that is a far cry from the much stronger claim that we need positive evidence that others are *reliable* before we may justifiably trust them. I do not see how someone could be in a position to judge good historical scholarship from bad unless he already knew some historical facts, in which case knowledge of historical facts must be prior to the ability to evaluate historical scholarship.

Miller insists: “If we appeal to the conclusions of others we must have good reasons, based on available evidence, [to believe] that these conclusions have been arrived at through reliable methodologies ultimately based on the perceptual level. Vague appeals to ‘the collective wisdom of mankind’ will not suffice.” (p. 79)

I will acknowledge a grain of truth in this: our appeal to the conclusions of others counts as genuine *knowledge* only if these conclusions have *in fact* been arrived at through reliable methodologies ultimately based on the perceptual level—since perception is, as Miller says, “our primary causal link with reality” (p. 80), and it is an epistemological commonplace that justified true belief must also be causally responsive to the facts in order to count as knowledge.²⁶ But I cannot agree that we must first have *evidence* that the conclusions have been arrived at through reliable methodologies and so forth before we can be justified in appealing to such conclusions.²⁷

Consider the analogy with sense-perception. In order for our perceptions to count as knowledge, it must be the case that we have correctly-functioning sense-organs that causally interact with reality in the right way; but in order to be justified in trusting my senses I do not *first* need to know how they work. Think of other people, then, as extensions of our sense-organs.²⁸ Just as we can’t know, and don’t need to know, how our sense-organs work before we’re justified in trusting them, so we can’t know, and don’t need to know, how our extended social organs work—though our justified beliefs will count as genuine knowledge only if those extended social organs are indeed working properly.

The analogy between perception and testimony may seem strained. But suppose you found out that your sense-organs work like this: all your nerves and receptors are filled with tiny gremlins passing notes to each other (which scientists have misidentified as electrical impulses and so forth). The first gremlin responds to an external stimulus by scribbling a note and passing it to the next gremlin in line, who transcribes a copy of the note and passes the copy to another gremlin, and so on. In

that case, perception itself would involve a kind of testimony. But should we trust our senses any less, just because we've found out this surprising fact about the mechanism of perception? If not, then why should enlarging the gremlins and placing them outside us make a difference?

The Aristotelian position is eloquently stated by Friedrich Hayek:

It is simply not true that our actions owe their effectiveness solely or chiefly to knowledge which we can state in words and which can therefore constitute the explicit premises of a syllogism. Many of the institutions of society which are indispensable conditions for the successful pursuit of our conscious aims are in fact the result of customs, habits or practices which have been neither invented nor are observed with any such purpose in view. ... [Man] is successful not because he knows why he ought to observe all the rules which he does observe, or is even capable of stating all these rules in words, but because his thinking and acting are governed by rules which have by a process of selection been evolved in the society in which he lives, and which are thus the product of the experience of generations. ... [O]ur adaptation to our environment does not consist only, and perhaps not even chiefly, in an insight into the relations between cause and effect, but also in our actions being governed by rules adapted to the kind of world in which we live, that is, to circumstances we are not aware of and which yet determine the pattern of successful actions. ... [T]he success of action in society depends on more particular facts than anyone can possibly know. And our whole civilization in consequence rests, and must rest, on our *believing* much that we cannot *know* to be true in the Cartesian sense.²⁹

From the fact that it cannot be known in the Cartesian sense, it of course does not follow that it cannot be known in the Aristotelian sense. If one possesses justified true belief causally responsive to the facts, what more is required?

In any case, sense-perception alone can never be sufficient to confirm or disconfirm any scientific hypothesis. It is a point familiar from Duhem and Quine³⁰ that scientific claims never face the tribunal of sense experience singly, but only as a corporate body, and so when a collection of claims is disconfirmed, one must still appeal to judgments of relative plausibility (i.e., to *endoxa*) to decide which claims to keep and which to reject.³¹

Miller's insistence on tracing our beliefs back to perceptual foundations is seconded by Mozes, who complains that the Aristotelian approach leads to dogmatism: "Many Aristotelian thinkers express strong judgments on what flourishing consists of; but they have no way to prove their judgments based on facts.... Any disagree-

ments among Aristotelians, on what flourishing consists of, are therefore irresolvable.” (p. 86)

Mozes offers the Aristotelian a false alternative: either ground your moral judgments in perceptual data alone, or admit that they are unargued assertions. But this leaves out of account the entire coherentist mode of argumentation which it was the central purpose of my original essay to defend.³² For example, in criticizing an article by Aristotelian philosopher Douglas Rasmussen, Mozes complains that “while he lists the goods which he regards as constituents of human flourishing—e.g., Health, Intellectual Ability, Honor, Justice—he provides no argument as to why a human life would be better or more flourishing for having these goods, and obviously expects his readers to regard that as self-evident.” (p. 99 n. 2) I see no reason to suppose that Rasmussen expects his readers to regard his claim as *self-evident*; what he expects, no doubt, is that they will regard his claim as *true*, which is another matter entirely. Rasmussen’s list of values is not immune to challenge; but it is plausible, and so the burden of proof lies with the challenger. What arguments Rasmussen needs to offer will depend on what objections the challenger makes. Moreover, if two Aristotelians disagree, they have argumentative options other than appealing to sense-perception; each can follow the method of Socratic dialectic, invoking *other* beliefs his opponent holds. This is how all philosophical argumentation (including Rand’s) actually proceeds, regardless of any official pronouncements of the arguers to the contrary.

Think of the way Socrates describes his own method in, for example, Plato’s *Gorgias*. Socrates distinguishes between the beliefs we currently hold (call these our surface beliefs) and the beliefs we’re actually *committed* to holding (call these our deep beliefs). The latter are the beliefs we *would* accept if we traced out all the implications of our surface beliefs and resolved any inconsistencies among them; and the purpose of the dialectical method is to uncover our deep beliefs. When one of Socrates’ interlocutors gives voice to a surface belief, Socrates asks questions in order to elicit other surface beliefs that the interlocutor holds. Socrates appeals to these other beliefs to show that there is a contradiction in the interlocutor’s overall belief-set, and invites the interlocutor to revise his belief-set in whatever way he finds most plausible—thereby moving the interlocutor closer to his deep beliefs.

The point of mentioning Socrates’ method in this context is to show that from the fact that people have different *surface* beliefs about, say, the components of the good life, it does not follow that their *deep* beliefs on the issue must also be different. Hence a dispute that cannot be settled by appeal to sense-perception may nonetheless be resolvable through dialectical argumentation. Is such argumentation guaranteed to produce convergent judgments? No, nothing guarantees this. (Socrates claimed that everyone ultimately had the *same* deep beliefs; but this seems overly optimistic.) But the lack of such guarantee is no reason to declare a stalemate so early in the game.

Mozes also finds objectionable Aristotelianism’s stress on deference to the opinions of the wise:

But would the man of practical wisdom, gained through experience, be able to give *evidence* for his judgments, and justify them to a less experienced person? From my reading of Aristotle's ethics, and also from Long's discussion, this does not seem to be a requirement. For me personally, that has always been the aspect of Aristotle's ethics that I liked the least; it seems to justify the attitude which, as a child, I encountered in many adults and deeply resented, i.e., the attitude that because of their claim to greater experience they knew better than I did and had no need to give me any reasons. (p. 86)

Let me first point out that Mozes' critique of the appeal to *endoxa* can itself be seen as an appeal to *endoxa*; the fact that Aristotelianism would justify an attitude that causes resentment is being treated as a reason to reject Aristotelianism. This objection appeals to emotions as tools of cognition. Such an appeal is forbidden on Objectivist principles, but not on Aristotelian ones, so Mozes' objection is one that the Aristotelian must take seriously.

To answer this objection, we must distinguish two questions: Will (can, should) the experienced judge offer *some* justification to the less experienced? And will (can, should) the experienced judge offer a *complete* justification to the less experienced? The answers to the questions are *yes* and *no*, respectively.

Consider the following analogy. As most professors will tell you, many college students have difficulty recognizing when an author is being ironic; they tend to take at face value essays like Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal" and "An Argument to Prove that the Abolishing of Christianity in England May, As Things Now Stand, Be Attended with Some Inconveniences and Perhaps Not Produce Those Many Good Effects Proposed Thereby." The principal reason for this is that such students simply haven't done much reading in their lives, or at least not much subtle or complicated reading, and so have not acquired a *feel* for irony. Now a good teacher will not simply say "take my word for it; Swift is being ironic," but rather will draw the student's attention to textual clues that indicate the likelihood of ironic intent. Would anyone be likely to describe as "modest" a proposal that the Irish solve the problem of famine by eating their babies? And would anyone in the 18th century have seriously talked about the highly charged issue of abolishing Christianity in such a mild, tentative, and wishy-washy way? Even tests like these, however, require for their application a certain sensitivity to language that many students may not yet have acquired; and in any case there is no way to teach a student a precise set of rules that will enable him to identify irony whenever he encounters it. Recognizing irony is an acquired skill rather than an algorithmic procedure. An experienced judge does not assemble textual evidence and then *infer* ironic intent; he simply *sees* that the writing is ironic, just as a literate person simply *sees* the word "Plato" in my original essay's

Figure 1. There is no shortcut available to the inexperienced student; he simply needs to do more reading.

Likewise, then, an experienced moral judge will certainly offer as much explanation as he can to the less experienced, rather than smugly asserting his own superior wisdom. But there are no grounds for supposing that the experienced judge will be able to articulate fully all the reasons for his judgment, or that those who are less experienced will be able to see fully the force of all the reasons he does articulate.³³

The Aristotelian insight that wisdom need not be fully articulate in order to count as wisdom applies to the thought of Ayn Rand herself. Considered in broad outline, Rand's overall outlook is, I think, remarkably on target. The reliability of her philosophical instincts on a vast range of issues—metaphysical, epistemological, psychological, ethical, political, sociological, and aesthetic—is impressive. I have argued that her attempts to articulate reasons to support those instincts are, in a number of cases, less successful. But a mind can track truth without understanding *how* it does it; we can know without knowing how we know. It is reasonably clear from Rand's early writings that the basic elements of her worldview were already in place before she developed the philosophical arguments that were to serve as that worldview's putative foundations. As she herself observed in a journal entry from May 15, 1934:

It may be considered strange, and denying my own supremacy of reason, that I start with a set of ideas, then want to study in order to support them, and not vice versa, i.e., not study and derive my ideas from that. But these ideas, to a great extent, are the result of a subconscious instinct, which is a form of unrealized reason. All instincts are reason, essentially, or reason is instincts made conscious. The "unreasonable" instincts are diseased ones. ... Some day I'll find out whether I'm an unusual specimen of humanity in that my instincts and reason are so inseparably one³⁴

Rand's own philosophical achievement is itself, then, an illustration of the coherentist theory I've been defending.

The same point may be made, by extension, concerning those of us who have been influenced by Rand's work. Karl Marx once remarked that, although he had come to reject many of the ideas of Ludwig Feuerbach, he would never have become a serious philosophical thinker if he had not started out as a Feuerbachian. The example is perhaps an unhappy one, since Marx never *did* become an especially serious philosophical thinker; and having been a disciple of Feuerbach was part of the problem. Nonetheless, I can say in a similar spirit that I would not have reached my present views if I had not started out my philosophical career as a Randian (or quasi-Randian). Like Theseus' ship (or Neurath's raft), the convictions I hold now resulted from Rand's outlook through a process of piecemeal replacement over the course of two decades,

as I subjected my beliefs to critical scrutiny, refining and revising them until, in the end, the product could no longer be called Randian; but it is to Rand that I owe the fact that I got pointed in roughly the right direction at the start.

What was it about Rand's philosophy that won over those of us who have been deeply influenced by her writings? The secret, I suggest, is not her skill in tracing her ideas back to their foundations in sense-experience, but rather her skill in presenting those ideas in such a powerfully attractive and inspiring way—her instinctive feel for the truth, and her ability to communicate that intuition to others. In short, we accepted Rand's theories as plausible appearances—as *endoxa*.

Before we are too quick, then, to reject the Aristotelian notion that a person's contact with truth might be mediated by and through other people, we should keep in mind the extent to which our own understanding is mediated by and through the philosophical instincts of one particular "unusual specimen of humanity."

Notes

1. By this phrase I mean to refer not only to the Objectivist movement proper but, more broadly, to all those (including myself) whose thinking has been significantly influenced by Ayn Rand.
2. Anaximander, Heraclitus, and some Pythagoreans held that the shadow on the moon during an eclipse is cast not by the earth but by another celestial body. Anaximenes held that the earth is shaped like a disk with a flat base and a convex surface. Nor were these hypotheses arbitrary. In the case of Anaximenes, for example, the convex surface (on which we live) is to explain why the heavens look different in different geographical regions, and the flat base is to explain why the earth apparently floats in midair (a flat base generating more wind resistance than a convex base). Do we know these rival theories are wrong? Sure. Do we know this on the basis of our own personal sensory experience alone? That seems very doubtful.
3. Miller (p. 71) describes as controversial my taking Aristotle's use of *endoxa* "very expansively to include most beliefs, rather than a relatively small set of beliefs which have survived the critical scrutiny of previous scientists and philosophers." But Aristotle tells us repeatedly (e.g., at *Topics* 100 b 20–22, 101 a 11–12, 104 a 9–12) that the *endoxa* are the beliefs of the wise or the many. Far from being idiosyncratically permissive, my interpretation actually gives critical scrutiny a more important role in the formation of *endoxa* than do those interpretations (e.g., Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Terence Irwin, *Aristotle's First Principles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988)) that treat *endoxa* as interchangeable with "common beliefs" (as if *only* "the many" were relevant).
4. The critique of what I'm calling the alien-explorer model (more often called the Cartesian model) is a central theme both in contemporary feminist epistemology and in the social thought of Friedrich Hayek, as well as in the theory of *shabda-pramana* ("testimonial evidence") of Hindu logic, whose Nyaya and Mimamsa schools defend testimony (*shabda*) as a source-of-knowledge (*pramana*) separate from perception and inference (against the alien-explorer view of the Buddhist school of Dharmakirti, which recognizes no *pramana*

but perception and inference, and reduces *shabda* to a version of the latter).

5. Leonard Peikoff, *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* (New York: New American Library—Dutton, 1991), p. 54.
6. Miller (p. 67) worries that by “data of the senses” I mean something like the awareness that “something red and round is now appearing.” But I use this phrase simply to refer to what the senses reveal to us, not to “sense-data” in the technical positivist sense. For Rand and Aristotle alike, the senses put us in direct cognitive contact (epistemically direct, not causally direct) with objective, mind-independent entities like tables, trees, and termites.
7. This in turn suggests that the real difference between humans and dogs is not that we can believe there’s a cat in front of us while dogs can’t—for it’s hard to see how we can make sense of animal behavior without ascribing such beliefs to them—but rather that we can think about cathod in the abstract while dogs cannot. So *either* animal awareness involves concepts but cannot have concepts as its object, *or else* perceptual judgments do not require concepts. Either conclusion would seem to require a major revision of Rand’s theory of concepts; but that is a broader issue than I can raise here.
8. Miller says (p. 68) that a baby, in recognizing its baby bottle and distinguishing it from its rattle, is in possession of implicit concepts. But then animals will have to have implicit concepts too; the difference will be that our implicit concepts can rise to explicitness and theirs can’t. This raises again the problems I point to in the previous footnote.
9. Perhaps perception at least tells us that this something-or-other *exists*. Miller tells us (p. 68) that “to perceive a thing is to perceive that it exists.” But he also says that the concept of existence is only *implicit* in the percept, so it’s not clear that perception tells us even that much until perceptual judgment arrives on the scene.
10. Rand generally prefers to say that *certainty* is contextual. This is unfortunately ambiguous, since the term “certainty” is sometimes used in a truth-entailing sense and sometimes not.
11. As Miller seems to suggest on p. 79. In similar vein, Peikoff claims that hypotheses that cannot *presently* be confirmed or disconfirmed (e.g., the existence of intelligent life on other planets) are, *at present*, neither true nor false. I do not know whether Rand would agree with this subjectivist-sounding claim, but it strikes me as confusing metaphysics with epistemology—and doing so even more thoroughly than the logical positivists, who denied truth and falsity only to hypotheses that could *never* be confirmed or disconfirmed.
12. A defender of Rand might claim that for her, truth is an epistemic concept without metaphysical implications, so that the statement “the suspect committed murder” might be *true* even if the suspect did not in fact commit murder. But if so, then on Rand’s view “truth” really means something like justification, and Rand is merely a contextualist about justification—in which case she needs to show how it is possible to justify our common-sense beliefs (contextually or otherwise) without appealing to *endoxa*.
13. Incidentally, I’m a bit puzzled by Miller’s claim that my account of the theoretical/practical distinction “defines a faculty (namely, theoretical reason) which is—on Long’s own interpretation—more fundamental in terms of a faculty (practical reason) which is less fundamental.” (p. 65; emphasis mine.) I do not regard either theoretical or practical reason as more fundamental than the other; both are equal and coordinate branches of the more fundamental concept of reason as such.
14. “The Nature of Government,” p. 330, in *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* (New York: New American Library, 1967), pp. 329–337.
15. As evidence for my claim that Rand’s views gradually grow more instrumentalist over time, consider the following two rather Aristotelian passages from her philosophical journals of

the early 1940s, and contrast them with the more Hobbesian formulations of the same issues in her later writings. On September 29, 1943, she wrote: “What is the exact procedure of a dishonest action? A man says a thing which he knows to be untrue or commits an act which he knows to be wrong—in order to obtain something from other men or achieve some end that depends on others. Whether he does it for personal gain or for any other reason, does not alter the procedure. The motive is irrelevant to the nature of the action. The nature of the action is that man acts upon what he believes to be agreeable or desirable to others, not upon his conception of the truth, that he acts to deceive others, they are his first concern, they determine his conduct. This is the placing of others above self.” (David Harriman, ed., *The Journals of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1997), p. 261) This makes it sound as though the wrongness of dishonesty lies within the action itself—its character as an expression of dependency—rather than in its expected results.

Still more striking is her journal entry of June 30, 1945: “Since man’s status as man is within his own keeping ... the basis of his morality is the preservation of himself *as man*, not just the preservation of a physical hulk (which, incidentally, cannot be preserved without the preservation of his human spirit).” (Ibid., p. 276) Notice that the parenthetical remark is explicitly described as *incidental* to her main argument, rather than as constituting the essence of that argument (as it would seem to be for the later Rand). What is *primarily* wrong with subhuman survival (“the preservation of a physical hulk”) is not that it is likely to be short but simply that it is subhuman.

16. I also raised the question of why Rand’s instrumentalist case for honesty toward the innocent doesn’t commit her to honesty toward the guilty as well. (Rand suggests that lying is wrong because it requires of us the cognitively overwhelming task of keeping track of all of our lies. I had replied that such a task should be a welcome challenge to an enterprising Randian hero, and I pointed to Francisco d’Anconia’s ingenious and laudable schemes in *Atlas Shrugged* for defrauding oppressive governments.) Mozes replies: “Someone who lies to defend himself against criminals, is lying to people who have already chosen force rather than reason and trade as their way of dealing with him, so he is already unable to gain value from them.” (p. 94) But this seems overstated. Governments routinely initiate force against their citizens; but they also provide their citizens with various services that citizens value, including police protection, roads provision, and postal delivery. That some or all of these functions might be better provided by private firms competing on a free market does not change the fact that the services are of genuine value, and so it is not true that we cannot gain value from people who use force against us. As David Kelley notes: “Most of our transactions in the world are with people of mixed character. ... The circumstances in which we act are normally complex, and the consequences various. We use principles to identify the goods and ills at stake, but we must then weigh the good against the ill This normally requires that we consider specific degrees of good or harm. ... Such weighing of costs and benefits is the only possible method of acting on principle” (David Kelley, *Truth and Toleration* (privately printed, 1990), pp. 20–21)
17. This is the position I described in my original essay as “rule-egoism” (by analogy with rule-utilitarianism). I did not intend to suggest “a person holding a list of out-of-context rules to limit his actions.” (Mozes, p. 99 n. 11) There can be more and less context-sensitive versions of rule-egoism, just as there can be more and less context-sensitive versions of rule-utilitarianism. To avoid confusion, however, I shall use the term “indirect egoism” instead.

Rand’s indirect-egoist case for acting on principle rather than on a case-by-case basis parallels the indirect-utilitarian arguments of John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer, and Friedrich Hayek. As John Gray observes, for these thinkers “indirect utilitarianism means above all that the test of utility—the promotion of greatest happiness—is to be applied, not to specific practical questions, but to whole systems of rules or codes of conduct. The

Principle of Utility is a standard of evaluation for social systems or networks of practices and will be self-defeating if attempts are made to turn it into a maxim for practical life. In practical life, we are generally best advised to rely upon maxims much more specific than the Principle of Utility.” (John Gray, *Hayek on Liberty*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 96) A still closer parallel to Rand can be found in Hayek’s indirect-utilitarian claim that part of the reason to abide by such rules is to reduce cognitive complexity:

“The function of rules of conduct [is] as a means for overcoming the obstacle presented by our ignorance of the particular facts [T]he enforcement of these abstract rules serves the preservation of an equally abstract order whose particular manifestations are largely unpredictable, and ... this order will be preserved only if it is generally expected that those rules will be enforced in all cases, irrespective of the particular consequences some may foresee. This means that, though these rules ultimately serve particular ... ends, they will do so only if they are treated not as means but as ultimate values This is what is meant by the principle that the ends do not justify the means [H]owever much we may often dislike the unforeseeable consequences of applying the rules in a particular case, we can usually not see even all the immediate consequences, and still less the more remote effects that will be produced if the rule were not expected to be applied in all future instances. ... Indeed there would be no need for rules if men knew everything The essence of all rules of conduct is that they label *kinds* of actions, not in terms of their largely unknown effect in particular instances, but in terms of their probable effect on the continuous maintenance of an order of actions The facts that rules are a device for coping with our ignorance of the effects of particular actions, and that the importance we attach to these rules is based both on the magnitude of the possible harm that they serve to prevent and the degree of probability that [such harm] will be inflicted if they are disregarded, show that such rules will perform their function only if they are adhered to for long periods.” (Friedrich A. Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty, Volume 2: The Mirage of Social Justice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp. 8, 16–17, 21–22, 29)

18. My critique is analogous to those critiques of rule-utilitarianism that contend that it must slide into either act-utilitarianism or deontology.
19. Do I become unable to notice such things because I have brainwashed myself not to notice them? That seems implausible.
20. Mozes will presumably deny that we can “know” such actions to be morally impermissible unless we can ground such a judgment in sense-perception. If my epistemological arguments have been successful, however, then such a reply would be out of place.
21. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1110 a 25–29.
22. For a broadly similar argument, see David Schmidtz, *Rational Choice and Moral Agency* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).
23. Mozes suggests (p. 98) distinguishing the first-person from the third-person perspective. From the first-person perspective, moral values are seen as ends in themselves, while from a third-person perspective, they are seen as means to survival. But for someone who accepts the primacy of existence over consciousness, how can what a person’s reasons for action are depend on the perspective from which the person is viewed?
24. A somewhat similar argument is offered in Robert J. Bidinotto, “Survive or Flourish? A Reconciliation,” *Full Context* 6 No. 6 (February 1994) pp. 1, 3–5, and 6, No. 8 (April 1994) pp. 5–9. <www.vix.com/objectivism/writing/RobertBidinotto/SurviveOrFlourish.html>.
25. In criticizing my comparison between Aristotle’s conception of essence and Rand’s conception of identity, Miller writes: “For Rand being snub-nosed is part of the identity of Socrates, in addition to being human.” (p. 82 n. 36) There seem to be two ways of taking

this claim. In one, it means that Socrates would cease to exist if he went to a plastic surgeon to have his nose altered; the person before the operation would have a different *identity* from the person afterward. Rand cannot mean this; so snub-nosedness cannot be part of Socrates' identity in the sense of making him who he is. The other way of taking it is that snub-nosedness is a property Socrates has; so it is not *constitutive* of his identity, but merely accidentally conjoined with it. But this is the Aristotelian view. So I'm not certain where the difference between Aristotle and Rand lies. (Is qualitative identity—having the same properties—being confused with numerical identity—being the same individual?) In any case, neither interpretation will give Mozes what he wants, which is for Socrates' *virtues* to be part of his identity (so that survival involves survival *with those virtues*) while Socrates' *vices* are not.

26. For the classic statement of why justified true belief alone cannot be knowledge, see Edmund Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?," *Analysis* 23 (1963), pp. 121–123.
27. Perhaps Miller is worried that on the approach I advocate, a person should simply passively accept the authority of others. This is not my view. (On the contrary, as Mill points out in *On Liberty*, it is precisely because *endoxa* must survive challenge and critique that they are such reliable guides to truth.) Each of us has a responsibility as a rational being to examine the appearances critically (where the "appearances" include what others tell us). But such critical examination is a matter of being alert for evidence against the appearances, not of demanding evidence for them.
28. Is this social metaphysics? No, it is social epistemology, which is quite another matter.
29. Friedrich A. Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty, Volume 1: Rules and Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), pp. 11–12. Rand's opposition to the kind of view Hayek defends here is stated in her essay "The Rational Faculty," in *Journals*, op. cit., pp. 305–310—where, it seems to me, she fails to see that from the correct observation that thought is an attribute of the individual rather than a collective, it does not follow that the *cognitive status* of an individual's thoughts cannot consist, in part, in some relation to a collective.
30. See, e.g., Willard Van Orman Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," *Philosophical Review* 60 (1951), pp. 20–43.
31. This explains why Aristotle draws no firm boundary between induction (reasoning from sensory evidence) and dialectic (reasoning from *endoxa*); see Miller, p. 72.
32. It also leaves out of account the positive case offered by Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* I—or, for that matter, by myself in Section IX of "Reason and Value." (For some elaboration on the case I present there, see my "Aristotle's Conception of Freedom," *Review of Metaphysics* 49 (June 1996), pp. 781–784; "The Irrelevance of Responsibility," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 6, no. 2 (Summer 1999), pp. 118–145; "The Nature of Law, Part IV: The Basis of Natural Law," *Formulations* 4, No. 2 (Winter 1996–97), <www.freenation.org/fnf/a/F42L1.html>; and "In Defense of Archetypes: A Response," *Formulations* 4, No. 3 (Spring 1997), <www.freenation.org/fnf/a/F43H4.html#Long>.)
33. "Now our topic will be adequately discussed if it has been elucidated in a way that accords with the subject matter; for the same degree of precision is not to be sought in every kind of discourse. ... For it befits an educated person to seek as much precision in each field as the nature of the subject admits of; for demanding demonstrative proofs from an orator is obviously on a par with accepting appeals to plausibility from a mathematician. Each person judges well the things he knows, and about those things he is a good judge. ... That is why a youth is not a proper student of political science, because he is inexperienced in the actions of life.... Every account of what is to be done needs to be stated in outline and not with precision.... In matters of conduct and benefit there is nothing fixed, just as in matters

of health. Given that the general account is like this, the account of the particular lacks precision all the more. For these fall under no expertise or profession; the agents themselves must consider in each case what is suitable to the occasion, just as occurs in medicine and navigation. But although the present account is of this sort, as much assistance should be offered as possible.” (Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1094 b 13–1095 a 2, 1104 a 1–12; cf. 1137 a 13–b 32)

“A man may learn to write grammatically by rule, with the most absolute infallibility But there are no rules whose observance will infallibly lead us to the attainment of elegance or sublimity in writing; though there are some which may help us, in some measure, to correct and ascertain the vague ideas which we might otherwise have entertained of those perfections. And there are no rules by the knowledge of which we can infallibly be taught to act upon all occasions with prudence, with just magnanimity, or proper beneficence: though there are some which may enable us to correct and ascertain, in several respects, the imperfect ideas which we might otherwise have entertained of those virtues.” (Adam Smith *Theory of Moral Sentiments* III.6.11)

34. *Journals*, op. cit., pp. 72–73.

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