

THE
LOGICAL STRUCTURE
OF
OBJECTIVISM

“Beta” Version

By William Thomas and David Kelley

Working draft: not for duplication or resale
Copyright 1999



The Logical Structure of Objectivism

“Beta” Version

By William Thomas and David Kelley



Preface to the “Beta” Version

This volume is a working draft, produced for the “Logical Structure of Objectivism” course at the 1999 Institute for Objectivist Studies Summer Seminar. The purpose of the “beta” version is to provide the course participants with a textbook, and to allow us, the authors, to obtain a wider reader response before we do our final revisions on the first edition. In effect, we are inviting the course participants to contribute to the re-writing process.

Readers may notice that this is a rough document in several respects. The earlier chapters are more polished than the later ones. The notes are still incomplete, and although it is mentioned at several points in the text, there is as yet no “fold out diagram” to show the entire pattern of argument in one page. The text has not received the meticulous proof-reading for typographical errors that one expects of a book published for sale. All these shortcomings are the sign of a work-in-progress. As such, this “beta” version is not for resale or scholarly citation. Of course, all rights to the text and diagrams are reserved.

Nevertheless, this version is the product of a thorough composition process, and it is essentially sound. We stand behind the logic of the arguments and the appropriateness of the evidence on which they are based. Although we anticipate further revisions before publication, we expect these to be largely stylistic. The “beta” version is home cooking, but it is an intellectual meal for all that.

But first, a word of thanks: We are especially grateful for the comments and support we have received from Frank Bubb, Eyal Mozes, David Ross, Roger Donway, and Donald Heath, and also for the contributions of many others. We thank them for the improvements that have resulted from their comments, but, to practice what we preach, we take full responsibility for the final product.

Feel free to dig in.

William Thomas and David Kelley

June 5, 1999

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	i
Introduction	1
The Systematic Level of Understanding	2
The Structure of Knowledge	7
Induction and Deduction.....	9
Context	12
Diagramming the Logical Structure	14
Notes	17
Chapter 1: Knowledge	19
Axioms	19
Perception as the Basis of Knowledge	30
Knowledge is Hierarchical and Contextual	37
Reason and Objectivity	40
Emotions and Reason	43
Conclusion	47
Notes	48
Chapter 2: Life and Needs	51
Life as the Ultimate Value	51
Life and Happiness	60
The Basic Logical Structure of the Objectivist Ethics.....	64
Context and Ethics	66
Needs	68
Capacities	71
Flourishing and Survival	72
Notes	76
Chapter 3: Material Values and Reason	81
The Logical Structure of Values	81
The Role of Reason in the Logical Structure of the Ethics	84
Production and Life	86
Reason and Production	89
Unit-Economy and the Need for Reason	92
Thinking in Principles	95

Conclusion	99
Notes	99

Chapter 4: Spiritual and Social Values 101

The Cardinal Values	101
Reason as a Cardinal Value	104
Purpose as a Cardinal Value	107
Self as a Cardinal Value	109
Other Spiritual Values	113
Education	113
Career	115
Philosophy as a Value	116
Art as a Value	124
Social Values	129
Economic Exchange	129
Communication	130
Visibility	130
Conclusion	134
Notes	135

Chapter 5: Virtues 139

Virtues and Character	139
Rationality	140
Virtues and Rationality	142
Integrity	146
Integrity and Principles	147
Character and Integrity	150
Productiveness	158
Productive Work as One's Central Purpose	166
Productiveness, Achievement, and Responsibility	170
Honesty	173
Pride	184
Conclusion	190
Notes	191

Chapter 6: Social Virtues 197

Autonomy: Cognitive Independence	198
Justice	204
Moral Judgment	208
The Trader Principle (Introduction)	215
Elements of the Trader Principle	216

Non-Self-Sacrifice	217
Existential Independence	221
Non-Coercion	228
The Trader Principle (Conclusion)	233
Benevolence	236
Notes	240

Chapter 7: Freedom and Government	245
Freedom and Rights	246
Property Rights	251
Government and Law	254
Limited Government	261
Conclusion	262
Notes	263

Conclusion	267
Feedback Loops	267
A Flourishing Life	268
Living Principles	269
Notes	270

List of Diagrams

Introduction

Levels of Understanding Diagram	3
Induction and Deduction Diagram	10
Needs and Values Diagram	14
Needs and Allah Diagram	16

Chapter 1: Knowledge

Diagram 1.1: The Axioms of Awareness	20
Diagram 1.2: The Basis of Knowledge	31
Diagram 1.3: Hierarchy and Context	38
Diagram 1.4: Knowledge and Reason	41
Diagram 1.5: Reason and Objectivity	42
Diagram 1.6: Emotions and Reason	45

Chapter 2: Life and Needs

Diagram 2.1: Life and Value	53
Diagram 2.2: Happiness and Life	61
Diagram 2.3: The Basic Logical Structure of the Ethics	65
Diagram 2.4: Needs and Values	70
Diagram 2.5: Illustration of Ethics as if Based on Flourishing...	74

Chapter 3: Material Values and Reason

Diagram 3.1: The Logical Structure of Values	82
Diagram 3.2: Production and Needs	86
Diagram 3.3: Reason and Production	91
Diagram 3.4: Unit Economy and Reason	94
Diagram 3.5: Principles	97

Chapter 4: Spiritual Values

Diagram 4.1: Cardinal Values	102
Diagram 4.2: Cardinal Values and Philosophy	117
Diagram 4.3: Context and Philosophy	122
Diagram 4.4: Art	127
Diagram 4.5: Visibility	131

Chapter 5: Virtues

Diagram 5.1: Rationality	142
Diagram 5.2: Principles and Integrity	149
Diagram 5.3: Character as a Value	152
Diagram 5.4: Character and Integrity	156
Diagram 5.5: Productiveness and Material Values	161
Diagram 5.6: Productive Work as One's "Central Purpose" ..	167
Diagram 5.7: Productiveness and Responsibility	171
Diagram 5.8: Honesty and Rationality	174
Diagram 5.9: Honesty and Deception	178
Diagram 5.10: Pride	186

Chapter 6: Social Virtues

Diagram 6.1: Cognitive Independence	201
Diagram 6.2: Justice and Rationality	205
Diagram 6.3: Moral Judgment	209
Diagram 6.4: Trade: Non-Self-Sacrifice	218
Diagram 6.5: Trade: Existential Independence	223
Diagram 6.6: Trade: Non-Coercion	229



Diagram 6.7: Trader Principle	234
Diagram 6.8: Benevolence	236

Chapter 7: Freedom and Government

Diagram 7.1: Freedom and Rights	248
Diagram 7.2: Property Rights	253
Diagram 7.3: Government and Law	257
Diagram 7.4: Government and Effectiveness	260
Diagram 7.5: Limited Government	262



INTRODUCTION

People who first read an Ayn Rand novel are likely to be struck by two characteristics of her writing. The first is its evocative power: Rand describes a scene so vividly that, later, you remember it as if you had lived it. This artistry can be seen in her ability to express a mood or personality in a single detail and her method of capturing a complex idea in a stark, dramatic symbol.

But an Ayn Rand novel is also striking for the logical power of her ideas. Rand's narratives are her means of presenting a philosophy, and that philosophy comes across with the persuasive power of a locomotive barreling down a track. Her ideas draw one in with their irresistible logic: the way one idea leads to the next; the way the answer to one question leads to another question that is answered in turn; the way issues that at first seem unrelated are revealed as instances of a single concept; the way each element in the philosophy dovetails with every other.

There are many novelists with the ability to write evocative, dramatic narratives; it is the strength of the ideas within the narrative that makes Rand's novels stand out. Their enduring popularity and the impact they have had on so many lives result from both her literary ability and the logical power of her philosophy.

The goal of this book is to place that logical power within your grasp. To do this, we will lay out the structure of Objectivism, the basic anatomy of the system. We will examine the relationships among its central ideas, from the axioms of metaphysics and epistemology to the principles of political philosophy, and the evidence that each idea requires for its validation. This amounts to an unprecedented examination of the positive content of Objectivism — as distinct from criticisms of cultural trends or other philosophies — at a high level of thoroughness and precision.

Objectivism is a topic one can study at many different levels, from the most introductory to the most advanced. Some critics describe Objectivism as simple-minded, but the subtlety of Rand's ideas belies this assessment. In fact, these ideas are remarkable for the fresh approach they bring to the traditional problems of philosophy. They offer solutions with the technical sophistication to cut through tangles that have defied the great thinkers of history and continue to bedevil scholars today. Solving the problem of universals, and bridging the "is-ought" gap, are not signs of a simple-minded school of thought. On the other hand, it is true that Objectivism is intelligible to non-intellectuals. Because its principles are based in the facts of reality, they often have the appeal of common sense.

In this book, we obviously cannot lay out the full extent of Objectivist

thought in all its complexity, addressing every technical issue, pursuing every derivative application, exploring every new topic that further research suggests. That would be far beyond the scope of any one volume. But such an exhaustive survey of the philosophy is not our aim. Rather, we seek to give you the philosophy in overview; if not in one glance, then in one flow of reasoning. The fold-out diagram in the flyleaf, which begins with knowledge and ends with government, represents that flow.

On the other hand, as the complexity of the fold-out diagram indicates, this is not an introduction to Objectivism. To be able to grasp the material this book has to offer, you will need to be familiar with Ayn Rand's essential writings. These include not only Rand's fiction—especially *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*—but also the nonfiction essays in *The Virtue of Selfishness*, and other essays such as “What is Capitalism,”¹ “Philosophy, Who Needs It?” “Causality versus Duty,”² and “The Psycho-Epistemology of Art”³ in other volumes. These works by Rand will provide the reader with the necessary prerequisite: a familiarity with the core ideas in each area of the philosophy, and with the basic way in which the areas relate, with politics depending on ethics, which in turn depends on epistemology and metaphysics. We will analyze philosophical arguments using the simple diagramming technique presented in David Kelley's *The Art of Reasoning*. Chapter 5 of that book offers instruction in basic argument analysis for those who are unfamiliar with it.⁴

In addition to these prerequisites, we will frequently have occasion to refer to other major works in the Objectivist literature, including Leonard Peikoff's survey *Objectivism, the Philosophy of Ayn Rand*,⁵ Nathaniel Branden's work on the theory of self-esteem⁶ and David Kelley's monographs *Truth and Toleration*⁷ and *Unrugged Individualism*.⁸ We will also touch on certain issues that have arisen in the developing scholarship on Objectivism and related ideas. The reader who is curious to pursue these issues, or other technical aspects of philosophy, will find citations of useful literature in the notes.

The Systematic Level of Understanding

The purpose of this book is to deepen your understanding of the structure of Objectivism: how its principles fit together, and what evidence each of them requires. When you grasp the philosophy at this level, you will have a systematic understanding of it.

The systematic level is one of three essential levels at which one can understand a subject. This applies to the grasp of physics as much as to philosophy. The first level, in order of complexity, is an *intuitive* resonance, based on one's subconscious integration of accumulated information and experience. This is the level of understanding typical of a first-time reader of Rand's novels who responds with a “gut” reaction that the ideas are true and important. In

Levels of Understanding

Intuitive	Systematic	Scholarly
Unreflective acceptance of a principle, based on the subconscious integration of a mass of accumulated information and experience.	Ability to formulate principles explicitly and relate them logically to other principles and data.	Issues pertaining to the formulation and validation of the principles.
Physics: Common-sense experience of gravity.	Ability to state the law of gravity and its relation to other laws.	Physicist's knowledge of gravitational theory.
Philosophy: "Gut" reaction to Rand's novels.	Knowledge of central principles of Objectivism and their logical relationships.	Philosopher's understanding of Objectivism.

physics, the intuitive level is represented by our common-sense familiarity with gravity and momentum

The second level is *systematic* understanding, in which one can formulate the principles explicitly and relate them logically to other principles and data. In physics, this is the kind of understanding one gains from an introductory course in physics, which enables one to state Newton's laws of motion, Einstein's insights on the relationship between gravity and space-time, and their relation to everyday experience. In regard to Objectivism, the systematic level gives one the ability to grasp its principles explicitly, distinguishing the essential from the peripheral ones and understanding their logical relationships.

The third and most complex level is *scholarly* understanding, in which one develops an appreciation of the technical issues pertaining to the formulation and validation of the material. A trained, professional physicist, for example, is knowledgeable about the form of mathematics that Einstein employed to model Relativity, and is able to relate it to the standard manner of formulating Newton's Laws. Similarly, a philosopher's understanding of Objectivism includes a wealth of scholarly knowledge that goes beyond the systematic level.

Each of these levels represents a distinct way of understanding a set of ideas. What is the cognitive value of each of these levels? How thoroughly must one grasp a body of principles in order to be sure of them?

The intuitive level is quite useful. With only an intuitive understanding

of gravity, for instance, pre-modern people were able to build bridges, shoot arrows, and undertake other tasks requiring knowledge of gravity. In fact, we all have to rely to some extent on intuitive understanding, because we can't stop to reason out every issue and every event's implications for all our beliefs, at every instant. When we meet a stranger, for example, we have to rely on our experience of similar-seeming people to know how to act. In the short run, this knowledge is only available subconsciously: we don't have time to consciously inventory our past experience before we decide whether to smile at someone or not.

Most people hold their fundamental ethical and metaphysical beliefs at the intuitive level, and it is to this level of understanding that most popular philosophies and religions appeal. An idea seems intuitive because it resonates with our experience and our sense of life, and we can thereby develop a profound, "gut" sense of its truth or falsity, of right and wrong. An intuitive grasp of an idea feels strong, and it relates to the facts through our subconscious integration of our own experiences. Its subconscious, felt character is the source of its emotional strength, but is also the source of its limitations.

A felt or intuitive certainty is not the same as real, epistemological certainty, the certainty one acquires through consciously considering the facts. For example, there are many people to whom it seems intuitively obvious that the government should take some money from the rich and give it to the poor. And there are also quite a few to whom it seems intuitively obvious that it is sinfully self-indulgent to have sex for the sake of enjoyment, and not for the sake of conceiving children. In fact, there are many more people with intuitive beliefs of this sort than there are those who sympathize with Objectivism.

The intuitive level enables us to react to ideas, but rarely to initiate new ones. Many people say that when they first read Ayn Rand, they recognized her ideas as something they had always believed but were unable to articulate on their own. But it cannot literally be true that they had grasped the ideas before they read Rand: if one cannot formulate an idea for oneself, then it cannot be a genuine conviction. At the intuitive level one can *respond* to ideas: recognizing some as acceptable, rejecting others. But the limitations of this level become obvious as soon as one tries to explain something to someone else—or even to oneself.

The systematic level represents a form of knowledge that overcomes these limitations. It allows one not merely to feel the truth of one's ideas, but to demonstrate it. It allows one to see weaknesses in one's own beliefs, and formulate new ideas to fill those gaps. The systematic level consists in knowing how to formulate principles and how to relate them logically to each other and the facts. This gives one the knowledge of *why* one believes what one does, and thus provides certainty — not the felt certainty of intuition, but the cognitive certainty that comes from *proof*.

Systematic understanding is also important for applying one's ideas to

different contexts, and for resolving apparent conflicts among principles. When it is not obvious how to apply a principle, or which principle to apply, one has to think the matter through. That is when one needs a better understanding than intuition provides. For instance, honesty is a virtue with a great deal of intuitive support, as evidenced by the fact that many different ethical systems have advocated it. But how does the principle of honesty apply to a case in which one may harm oneself by telling the truth? To know what to do in such a case one needs to know precisely what this virtue requires and how it serves one's values. But this in turn requires an understanding of one's values, and how they relate to one's virtues. It is only at the systematic level that one can formulate such an inquiry clearly.

A systematic understanding is especially important to someone who wants to communicate ideas. To explain a body of principles like Objectivism, one needs to be able to convey the principles and the reasoning behind them with clarity and precision. To develop those skills, one needs a kind of mental map of the principles and arguments. By way of analogy, consider the process of learning to draw. All of us can recognize a human form when we see one, but drawing it is much harder. For that, one needs to learn the underlying anatomy.

One means of spreading ideas is through polemics. Polemical arguments *seem* simple and direct, but good ones rest on a deeper foundation of thought. To be a successful polemicist, one needs to identify the essential issues at stake in a debate, and the only means of doing so is by understanding the logical relationships between them. In political arguments, for example, many advocates of laissez-faire capitalism get hung up over details such as how to finance a government in a free society, despite the fact that this issue is pretty far down the logical chain. Imagine you are debating the merits of capitalism with someone and this issue comes up. If this is your opponent's only objection to complete, laissez-faire capitalism, then the argument is won. Is your opponent going to argue for the welfare state because he *opposes* taxation? Not likely. Usually, you will find that your opponent has much more fundamental objections to laissez-faire: *these* are the issues you should address. A systematic understanding of the principles involved will allow you to foresee what those issues are and direct your polemics to addressing them in a convincing manner.

In short, to develop a solid, cognitive certainty about one's principles, to be able to apply them confidently to varying circumstances, and to be able to communicate them effectively, one needs understand them systematically. That is what is what this book is designed to help you achieve.

The Scholarly level of understanding is similar to the systematic in its conceptual and logical character. In a sense, it is the extension of systematic understanding: at some point, as one learns more and more about a system of ideas, the level of detail and focus of one's thinking and knowledge become scholarly. The difference between the two levels is quantitative, not qualitative,

yet it is significant.

For example, much scholarly work in Objectivism is focused on relationships between Objectivism and other positions in philosophy, both historical and contemporary. While some appreciation of these details is important for ordinary purposes, they are usually of concern to people with a more specialized interest in them. For example, the development of the theory of abstraction, from Plato and Aristotle through the Medievals to the Moderns, is an interesting story, but is of the same practical import as the history of scientific theories: it is not necessary to a solid understanding of what abstraction actually is.

Scholarly work also tends to deal with more subtle issues about exact formulations of principles, and the logical details of the relationships among them. These are important issues, and a philosophy that cannot treat them satisfactorily will always remain subject to refutation. We will be discussing some of the developments in the scholarly literature on Objectivism, especially those that raise an issue of formulation or justification that has significant implications for the rest of the system. However, most issues of formulation and interpretation at the scholarly level are not vital to one's understanding of, or legitimate certainty about, the main points of the philosophy. The scholar's knowledge is simply more detailed, thorough and, at times, esoteric.

The focus of this book is the positive content of Objectivism: the claims it makes about reality, human nature, values, and society. The other systematic surveys of Objectivism—notably Nathaniel Branden's and Leonard Peikoff's taped lecture courses, Peikoff's text *Objectivism*, and of course, Ayn Rand's own summary in John Galt's speech in *Atlas Shrugged*—all place a substantial amount of emphasis on criticizing contemporary culture and non-Objectivist philosophical viewpoints. For example, only the first third of Galt's speech is devoted to laying out Rand's philosophy. The other two-thirds amounts to an extended critique of the altruist-collectivist axis in Western thought. In the other surveys, this critique is admixed liberally into the body of the exposition.

The present work differs from these in being devoted to the positive content of Objectivism. The Objectivist critique of mysticism and altruism, and of their deleterious impact on Western culture, or the enumeration of the failings of the mixed economy, are worthy polemical topics, but outside the scope of this book. We will touch on such critiques only to the extent that they are required either to grasp or validate the positive content of the philosophy. With an understanding of that content, of course, you will be better placed to grasp and appreciate the Objectivist critique of other viewpoints.

Another difference from previous systematic surveys is our methodical examination of the essential ideas of Objectivism. By analyzing the argument for each principle, and calling attention to each place where fresh inductive evidence is required, we give the student of Objectivism unprecedented access to the logic of the philosophy. This examination of the philosophy is as

much concerned to teach *why* it has the structure it does as to convey *what* that structure is.

At times this has required some changes in formulation from those used in the surveys mentioned above, or from Ayn Rand's own writings. Besides stylistic differences, there are cases in which a careful examination of the nature of an argument or position has pointed up the need for clarification or a more substantial change. We have made such alterations only when the logical structure of the philosophy has demanded it and we have noted and explained the change in any case where our formulation differs significantly from the previous Objectivist literature.

Because our subject is the core theses of Objectivism, the content of this book is derived from the existing literature on the philosophy. Although our integration of the material is new, we have avoided offering untried research in this work. Any formulation we present is derived from literature that been subjected to criticism and analysis by knowledgeable scholars. We have, however, endeavored to express the philosophy in our own words. We include quotations from Ayn Rand's own writings to allow the reader to compare the substance of our presentation with the substance of hers, despite the differences in focus and tone.

The Structure of Knowledge

Before we consider the structure of this philosophy, we would do well to first understand why any philosophy has a structure. To see why, we need to consider some basic facts about human knowledge.

Epistemology is the branch of philosophy concerned with the nature of knowledge and the methods of validating it, that is, of identifying its factual basis. Epistemology has a double importance for us in understanding the logical structure of Objectivism. On the one hand, reason is part of the content of human nature, and therefore has significant moral and political implications. All of the ethical and political conclusions of Objectivism are based on this fact. Because epistemology tells us what reason is, how it operates, and what the different features of knowledge are, it forms part of the body of the philosophy. It will thus be one of the topics we turn to in Chapter 1, and the diagrams there will show the logical structure of the Objectivist epistemology.

But this body of knowledge is also relevant to our *method* of understanding the structure of Objectivism, including the principles of epistemology itself that we will analyze in Chapter 1. Epistemology explains why knowledge has a structure, and what the basic standards of logic are. So to understand the diagramming method we will be using in this book, we need to discuss certain aspects of epistemology here at the outset.

The principles presented in the diagrams identify facts, such as "rea-

son is volitional,” or, “to live, human beings must deliberately exert the effort to pursue consciously chosen values.” A principle is a proposition that identifies an essential or significant fact. A proposition is a complete thought, usually expressed as a sentence. Just as sentences are made of words, the proposition that a sentence expresses is composed of the concepts to which its words correspond. Our concepts are our ideas of categories or types of things and their attributes, actions, and relationships. Concepts allow us to grasp general facts about the world, covering the whole range from the physical objects that a child first learns about—milk, ball, dog, etc.—to abstract ideas such as cosine or justice that we derive by complex chains of reasoning. Because concepts are the building-blocks of this level of awareness, we call the knowledge that employs them “conceptual knowledge.”

By identifying facts in the form of propositions, we have an open-ended means of understanding reality. We can express any fact as a proposition; we can even express propositions for imaginary situations, “facts” that do not exist, such as “I own a winged pig.” The conceptual level of awareness thus covers the whole range of knowledge, from a child’s first words to the most complex theoretical structures of the arts and sciences.

But the conceptual level is not our direct means of being aware of the world. Our concepts are formed on the basis of the awareness we attain through perception. Perception is the integrated, automatic awareness of things that we receive through our senses. We do not have any direct means of grasping categories such as “man” or abstract attributes such “beauty,” except by deriving them from the data of perception. And what we are aware of by perception are particular things: *this* man, *that* beautiful statue. This means that all our knowledge must be derived by various processes of integration from perceptual data. These processes include:

- Forming concepts based on relevant dimensions of relative similarity among particulars: e.g. “tree,” “square,” etc.
- Generalizing from observation: e.g. “Dogs bark.”
- Drawing inferences from what we already know: e.g. “Because the cars have their wipers on, I can tell that it is raining outside.”
- Weighing evidence to draw conclusions about facts we cannot directly observe: e.g. the process of determining guilt in a criminal trial.
- Coming up with theories and hypotheses and testing them by experiment: e.g. the process of scientific research.

The diagrams in this book can abstractly summarize the essential results of these processes; they can’t substitute for the performance of them. This means that as you proceed through the book, you should actively engage the diagrams, and not accept them passively.

Because the conceptual level is derived from perceptual awareness, it is *hierarchical*. The vast amount of information we possess may feel as if it is

on the same level, but it is not. For instance, consider the way you think of two different facts: 1) You are looking at a book. 2) You are living in a democratic country. Both facts are obvious to you, but they are established quite differently. You can *see* that the book is a book; you cannot see whether your country is democratic. You can see what a book is, you cannot see what a democracy is. The concept of a book is more concrete than the concept of democracy.

All knowledge traces back to perception, but some knowledge is closer to the perceptual base and some is farther away. For instance, if we meet a woman, we can tell simply from her physical appearance that she is a woman, and not, say, a stone. But how would we tell if she is a *good* woman, or an evil one? We would need a prior criterion of good and evil, a criterion of value. Goodness and evil are not evident in a person's appearance, the way, say, hair color is. A person's moral character is a psychological fact about him; we must infer psychological facts from observable characteristics like how a person acts or what he says. As this example shows, the judgment that a thing is a human being is much more direct and basic than a judgment about a person's moral character. In fact, the one precedes the other: one has to identify a subject as a person before moral judgment becomes relevant.

The hierarchical character of knowledge means that it has a structure. In this sense, knowledge is like a tall building, with some items in the foundation, and others built up from the foundation. And just as a skyscraper has a steel frame, a body of knowledge has an essential structure.

Induction and Deduction

The logical processes by which we build up the structure of our knowledge are of two broad types, which logicians call *induction* and *deduction*. Although a technical discussion of these two processes could fill a book in itself, understanding their role in the structure of Objectivism requires only that we differentiate them on the basis of essentials.

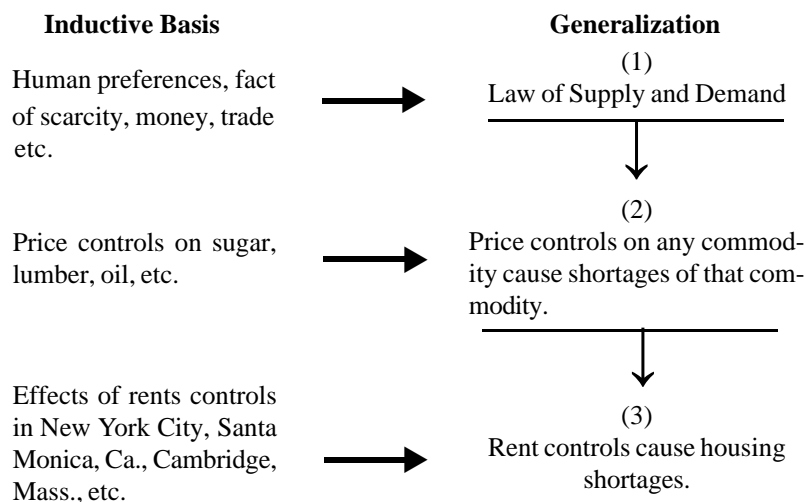
Induction is the process of drawing general conclusions from the observation of particular cases. For instance, we notice that all people age and die, that their bodies are fragile and can be fatally damaged. We generalize this observation as: All people are mortal. Deduction is the process of drawing out the implications of the general knowledge we already possess, usually by applying generalizations to specific instances of a type. Continuing our example, each of us knows that we will die some day by deducing it from the fact that all human beings are mortal.

Since our knowledge is hierarchical, resting on the base of perceptual observation of concrete things in our environment, it would obviously be impossible for us to build up our knowledge by deductive inference alone. Where would we get the generalizations on which deduction depends? For those gen-

eralizations we need inductive inference. Above the level of perception, all of our knowledge depends in one way or another on induction. In a sense, induction is like earning money: it is the process of acquiring new information. Deduction is like spending money, because it allows one to get the most out of one's store of inductive information. In most cases, our conclusions depend on both inductive and deductive procedures used in combination, just as we normally obtain economic goods by a combination of earning and spending money. A point of particular importance is that there can be inductive support at any level in the structure of our knowledge.

To understand this point, let's look at the example of the effects of rent controls. Economists know that rent controls lead to shortages of housing. The reasoning that leads to this conclusion is sketched out in the chart "Induction and Deduction" below:

Induction and Deduction



An economist *deduces* that rent controls lead to shortages from the more general point that **price controls on any commodity lead to shortages of that commodity**. This principle is in turn a deduction from the abstract **law of supply and demand**, which summarizes interaction in any marketplace.

The downward links between the generalizations are deductive, but *inductive* evidence can enter at every point. On the first level, the law of supply and demand has its basis in very abstract generalizations: that people have preferences, that they trade in goods, that goods are scarce (i.e., that not all wants

can be fulfilled), that people trade through the medium of money, and that markets establish common prices for goods. Notice that if neither this inductive basis nor that at the other levels existed, then the general principle would not be based on facts; it would be an *arbitrary* assertion. This is an instance of the principle that any item of knowledge must be based on inductive evidence at *some* level.

The general principle regarding the effect of price controls, at the second level of the chart, has its own inductive basis in the observation of commodity markets. When the principle has been derived by deduction, this inductive basis provides a source of independent confirmation. Any meaningful proposition, even one that we have established deductively, asserts some fact about reality. If it is true, then the fact that it asserts exists and we can confirm the fact inductively. This means that any true principle that we have established deductively should also have independent inductive support.

Inductive evidence plays a similar confirming role at the third level of the chart. The inductive support for the principle that rent controls lead to housing shortages is found in the experience of various cities with rent control policies. In the U.S. in recent decades, these cities have included New York City; Santa Monica, California; and Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Thus deduction and induction could not function apart from each other. Understanding the world in terms of generalizations allows us integrate large amounts of information in a compact form. Induction is the process of forming generalizations from the data we are aware of, but our generalizations would be useless if we failed to employ deduction to apply them to particular cases. Furthermore, deduction and induction must be employed together if we want our thinking to be robust against error. Inductive confirmation is not always necessary to establish the truth of a proposition: a conclusion that one has correctly deduced from true premises is itself true. However, when we deduce from a broad abstraction, such as the first level in the chart, to a more concrete principle, such as the third level, there is a danger that something essential to the more concrete case may have been left out.

Something is *essential* if it is a fundamental cause of what we seek to explain, a cause that explains many other effects. When we abstract from a wide range of data, as when we form principles that apply to *all* markets, we must ignore many details, such as whether the products in the market are durable, whether there are many comparable substitutes for a given product, whether information about prices and offers is well-distributed, whether there are many buyers and sellers, and so on. There is a danger that one of those details may be significant in a manner that is not obvious. By looking for direct inductive evidence of the conclusions we deduce from our generalizations, we can check to make sure nothing has been overlooked or incorrectly integrated.

On the other hand, accurate abstractions, connected by deductive in-

ferences, can put an enormous amount of information at our disposal in a concrete form. In the case of rent controls, the deductive relation to economic theory allows us to bring the whole gamut of economic experience to bear on the question at hand. For instance, there may be only three or four cities at any one time that have rent control regulations, and these may differ in detail so much that it is difficult to inductively determine the correct generalization that one should draw from the limited evidence. More abstract principles, such as those at levels (1) and (2) in the chart, which are linked deductively to the topic at hand, serve as a tremendous data-gathering system, a kind of cognitive lens, that focuses distant light on the subject.

We will have many opportunities to see the same pattern in our analysis of the logical structure of Objectivism. To take one of many examples that we will explore in detail later on, the political principle that man needs freedom in order to live successfully follows, through a chain of deductive inferences and new inductive generalizations, from the fact that reason is man's basic tool of survival. This conclusion about freedom is confirmed inductively by historical evidence about human well-being in free societies as opposed to unfree ones. This inductive support confirms the deductive derivation, assuring us that our reasoning has conformed to the facts. The deductive support assures us that we have interpreted the historical evidence correctly, that we have extracted the essential generalization to be drawn from the enormous mass of concrete facts.

Context

A common source of error in generalization is a failure to base one's conclusions in the full context of evidence. Our knowledge is *contextual* in virtue of its hierarchical nature. It does not consist in isolated bits of data, each with its own, self-contained meaning, each with its own separate relationship to reality. The meaning of any conclusion, and its relationship to reality—i.e. its truth or falsity—depends on its relationship to the network of other knowledge by which we derived it. Hierarchical knowledge is contextual because each item of knowledge is grounded in some particular evidence, in the awareness of certain types of things, a certain range of experience. In this sense, the context of knowledge is like the different places that the pylons of a building's foundation come to earth: the structure depends on many sources of support coming together. As the support changes, the superstructure of knowledge may change as well.

The meaning of a principle, in the Objectivist view, is determined by tracing the process by which it connects to reality. This means, among other things, establishing the context that a person integrates by means of concepts. A failure to attend to this is one reason why people discussing abstract ideas often “talk past” each other: they are using the same words, but they don't *mean* the

same things. Imagine having an argument of about capitalism with a Marxist: to a Marxist, capitalism is any system characterized by some private control over capital. To an Objectivist, capitalism is a *laissez-faire* system. To a Marxist, Sweden is a capitalist country; to the Objectivist, it is a mixed economy, with characteristics of both capitalism and socialism. Of course, the truth is *not* whatever one wants it to be, but the truth of one's principles depends on the meaning of one's terms, because it is that meaning to which the facts of reality either do or do not correspond.

This example also illustrates the importance of attending to the full context that lies behind an abstract idea. In the case of the concept of capitalism, classical liberals and economic theorists emphasize the basis of market interaction in property rights and freedom of contract. It is common, however, for people to ignore the effects of regulation and state intervention in characterizing a business as "private" and a system as "Capitalist." This leads to an odd disjunction between economic theory, which focuses on firms with full control over their choices, and the reality of most "Capitalist" systems, in which a firm's range of choice is quite delimited by regulations on wages and benefits, product categories, production methods, prices, and so on. The disjunction exists because many fail to attend to the difference between the context of economic theory and the context of the popular notion of "Capitalism."

The contextual nature of knowledge is also significant because one's context of knowledge changes over time. As individuals we become aware of new evidence and facts. Even the cognitive context of society as whole expands with exploration and new scientific discoveries. As one's context changes, the meaning of one's principles can change as well. For instance, in the 18th century, generalizations about "fish" integrated information about all creatures that swam, including whales and porpoises. This categorization was not a mistake: there are valid reasons for regarding swimming creatures with fins as similar. However, by the 20th century, marine biology was better understood, and the term "fish" came to be applied to a more narrow class of animals. The old knowledge about "fish" was not false; it is still true in terms of aquatic creatures. But now we have knowledge about fish, e.g. that fish are cold-blooded, that would not have applied to the old manner of classification.

Because one's knowledge is contextual, it can be expanded to apply to a wider range of circumstances as one actively expands it by investigating new evidence and information. One model of the development of knowledge from one context to the next is the transition from Newtonian to Einsteinian physics. Newton's mechanics accurately described the motions of bodies moving at low velocities relative to the speed of light, which was the context of evidence to which Newton had access. Centuries after Newton, Einstein was aware of a broader context of evidence, including improved astronomical observations, and the discovery that the relative velocity of light was constant

from all perspectives. Einstein's theory addresses that broader context, but in addressing Newton's original context, it replicates Newton's findings. Newton was not falsified by Einstein in the context in which his laws were solidly confirmed, indeed, he could not have been. On the other hand, the common assumption of the 18th Century, that Newton's mechanics would describe the motions of all objects at all times in all places, turned out to be in error.

Every expansion of one's context allows one to better understand reality. For this reason, we have a need to assimilate new knowledge and expand our context of knowledge over time.

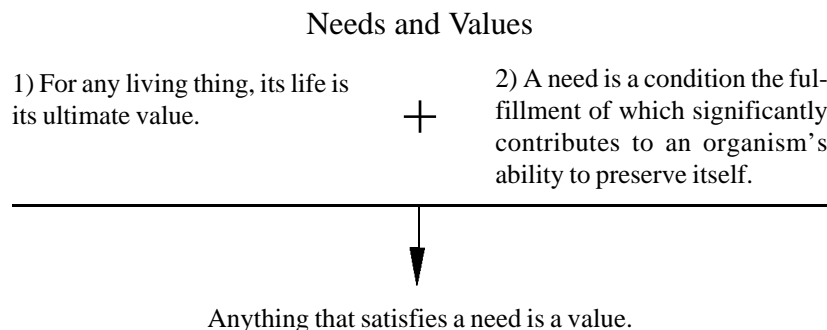
Diagramming the Logical Structure

The big diagram in the flyleaf represents the structure of the whole building that is Objectivism. It also represents the essential interconnections among the ideas. Using the diagram, we can trace back the basis of a highly abstract idea like moral judgment and we can see which ideas are basic to all of philosophy. By breaking the big diagram down into smaller, distinct diagrams of arguments, we make it easier for you to understand the individual connections and grasp the structure of each step in the reasoning. Notice that the flow of the big diagram is basically one-way, reflecting the fact that knowledge is hierarchical. Nevertheless, later conclusions do sometimes provide support for ones established earlier; we will include these backward flows in the big diagram, and discuss them in the text.

To see how a diagram works, consider the following argument, which plays an important role in the foundations of ethics (as we will see when we meet this diagram again in Chapter 2). The argument has two premises that give a conclusion:

- For any living thing, its life is its ultimate value.
- A need is a condition the fulfillment of which significantly contributes to an organism's ability to preserve itself.
- Therefore, anything that satisfies a need, is a value.

Represented as a diagram, this argument appears like this:



Notice the meaning of the symbols in the diagram. Each numbered proposition (a.k.a “premise”) expresses a significant fact. The symbols show how these facts are related. In this diagram, premise (1) and (2) are united by a plus symbol “ + ” and an underline that joins them together. The downward arrow shows a connection between the propositions that are underlined and the conclusion that follows from them. In this diagram, there is only one such inference from premises to a conclusion, but in most diagrams there will be several, and most of the conclusions will in turn serve as premises for the next stage of the diagram. The inference from premises (1) and (2) to the conclusion is essentially deductive in character, though we have not cast it in any of the standard forms used by technical formal logic. In other cases, arrows will represent inductive inferences from observations of various kinds. We will have to appeal to facts about human consciousness, which one knows introspectively, or to facts about social interaction, which have been studied by historians and economists, among others. All of these appeals to evidence are cases of induction.

These diagrams are important tools for highlighting the structure of an argument. In an argument presented in prose, it is easy to let a key premise slip past, or to be lulled by compelling rhetoric into accepting an erroneous inference. When an argument is presented as a diagram, it is easier to consider each principle or inference on its true merits, and to trace the effects that a change in the premises would have on the conclusions of the argument—and ultimately on the rest of the philosophy.

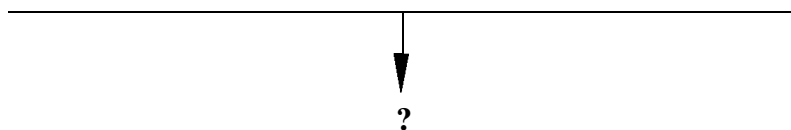
For example, Premise (1) above states that life is the ultimate value. In Chapter 2, this proposition is the conclusion of a preceding diagram. So, in the “Life and Needs” diagram, it is taken as proven. In the Objectivist ethics, life provides the foundation and context of the claims of ethics. The diagram allows us to trace the effect of this premise on the rest of the philosophy. Here, because life is the ultimate value, we see that every value serves a biological need. But suppose that life were *not* the ultimate value. Suppose instead, as the Muslims claim, that the ultimate value were submission to the will of God. Then our diagram would have a very different conclusion:

With this change to Premise (1), we certainly cannot conclude from the two premises that biological needs are the basis of values. Our original conclusion simply does not follow, nor would any conclusion based solely on the biocentric conception of value. Changing Premise (1) has changed the conclusion of the diagram, and that will affect every subsequent argument that depends on it.

In this way we can use the diagrams to assess how much a change in one principle in the philosophy would affect the rest of the philosophy. In the case of the argument we’ve been discussing, which defines what a value is, any change in the substance of the argument would have radical effects on the rest of ethics, because the idea of value stands at the root of ethics. Of course, the

Needs and Allah

1) For any living thing, submission to the will of God is its ultimate value.	+	2) A need is a condition the fulfillment of which significantly contributes to an organism's ability to preserve itself.
---	---	--



effect of a big change in the idea of “value” is one that most people can grasp without the use of diagrams. However, subtle changes as well as obvious ones can be highlighted in the diagrams.

The diagrams also force us to look in the other direction, to the underlying bases for our premises. Each premise must be supported either by some previous inference or by observation of particular facts in reality. In our example about life and needs, we noted that Premise (1) of the diagram is a conclusion of a previous diagram. As we will see, (1) is derived deductively from premises that are even more fundamental. Premise (2), by contrast, is supported inductively. The premise states the definition of the term “need” as biologists use it. Our knowledge that needs exist is a generalization from our observation of living things and the circumstances in which they live and die.

Now we have our tools in place to begin our examination of the logical structure of Objectivism. You are about to encounter the power of a system of ideas that proceeds with remorseless logic step-by-step, validating each claim it makes from the self-evident to the most derivative.

Ayn Rand named her philosophy “Objectivism” because its central theme is objectivity: the objectivity of knowledge in corresponding to facts, the objectivity of moral values as a species of facts, the objectivity of a political code derived from human nature. It is to the logical basis of her concept of objectivity that we now turn, that is, to the structure of the theory of knowledge.

-
- 1 Ayn Rand, "What is Capitalism," in *Capitalism, The Unknown Ideal* (New York: New American Library, 1966) New York: Signet, 1967 11-34.
 - 2 Ayn Rand, "Philosophy, Who Needs It?" in *Philosophy, Who Needs It?* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1982) New York: Signet, 1984 1-11, and "Causality versus Duty" in *ibid.* 95-101.
 - 3 Ayn Rand, "The Psycho-Epistemology of Art" in *The Romantic Manifesto* (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1969) New York: Signet, 2nd rev. ed., 1975, 15-24.
 - 4 David Kelley, *The Art of Reasoning, Third Edition* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998).
 - 5 Leonard Peikoff, *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1991).
 - 6 e.g. Nathaniel Branden, *The Psychology of Self-Esteem* (New York: Bantam, 1983) and *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem* (New York: Bantam, 1994) New York: Bantam, 1995.
 - 7 David Kelley, *Truth and Toleration* (Poughkeepsie: Institute for Objectivist Studies, 1990)
 - 8 David Kelley, *Unrugged Individualism: The Selfish Basis of Benevolence* (Poughkeepsie: Institute for Objectivist Studies, 1996).

CHAPTER 1: KNOWLEDGE

Epistemology and metaphysics are the foundation stones of philosophy. Before we can prove anything about the values we should seek or the rights society should respect, we need to ascertain the basic features of the world we live in (metaphysics) and the means by which we know it (epistemology), including the nature of our rational faculty and the requirements for objective knowledge. In the Introduction, we surveyed the essence of the Objectivist epistemology to explain the *method* that we are employing in this book. We can now begin our analysis of the *content* of Objectivism—the key ideas and their logical relationships—by diagramming the central tenets of the Objectivist epistemology. We will begin with the axioms of metaphysics and epistemology, and then go on to the perceptual bases of knowledge, the nature of conceptual integration, and the view of knowledge as hierarchical and contextual.

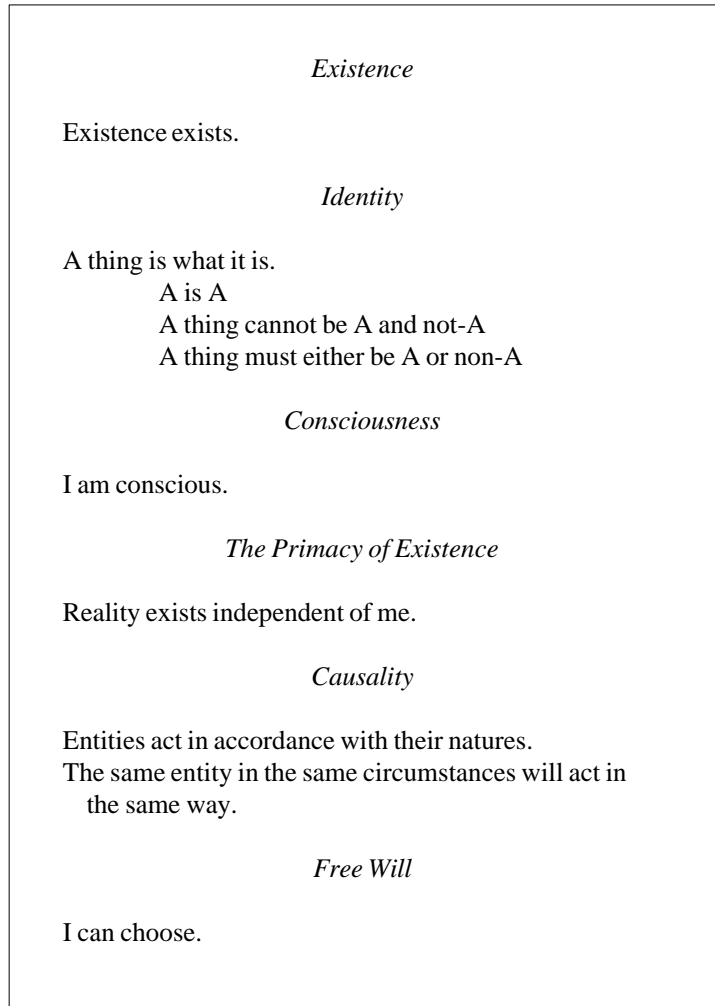
Axioms

In *Atlas Shrugged*, Ayn Rand wrote that “... the morality of reason is contained in a single axiom: existence exists—and in a single choice: to live.”¹ This statement has provided the basis for the false characterization of Objectivism as a philosophy that follows deductively from some initial premise or premises. Although the structure of Objectivism is logical, it is not rationalistic. In fact, Rand’s meaning in saying Objectivism is “contained in” the axiom of existence is that her philosophy is based entirely in facts of reality.

Metaphorically, we may speak of Objectivism as a kind of edifice, with a foundation and a superstructure. In this “edifice,” the “foundation” is the evidence on which the structure depends. This includes the axioms: as we will see, they are statements validated directly by perceptual observation. But the foundation also includes all the concrete judgments we make about the particulars we observe, including objects, events, people, emotions, social interactions, etc. In this respect, the axioms play a specific role as integrators of our knowledge, by specifying the goal of knowledge: the identification of what exists, and the basic method of knowledge: logic. Thus the axioms stand in relation to philosophy, and to all knowledge, much as basic facts of physics stand in relation to the construction of a building. In architecture, physical law summarizes the inescapable facts that the architect must take account of in designing a structure, from the foundation up to the roof. Similarly, any structure of knowledge, of any subject whatsoever, must take account of the basic inescapable facts that the axioms formulate. To use a different metaphor, we can say that knowledge is like a growing child taking in new sustenance and fuel (new perceptual evidence) from his environment every day, with the axioms functioning like the

genetic code which determines how the material from the environment will be incorporated into the growing structure.

Diagram 1.1: The Axioms of Awareness



Objectivism is founded on the axioms of Existence, Identity, Consciousness, and Causality. To grasp what these axioms refer to, we must attend carefully to certain inescapable facts of our experience. For example, as you read this page, you have not the slightest doubt that this book is what it is and not

something else. It is *The Logical Structure of Objectivism*, and not *Moby Dick*, a lawnmower, or some other thing: you take it for granted that it has an *identity*. You have no doubt that you will be able to turn the pages with your fingers, since that is how pages act: they will not ignite on contact, for instance. In other words, you take *causality* for granted. You count on the fact that you can see the book, and grasp its contents with your mind. In other words, you take your own *consciousness* of the facts of reality for granted.

Some philosophers argue that, while necessary to function in the world, these axioms are *arbitrary* assumptions, based on a leap of faith. Objectivism, on the other hand, recognizes that they are objective. The axioms are self-evident, omnipresent, inescapable aspects of existence of which one cannot help but be aware—in fact, one can notice these facts in any experience just as we did, above, in the experience of reading. When one is aware of any particular fact, one is aware of something in reality. Although the details of the things one is aware of differ from one instance of awareness to the other, it is always the case that **something exists of which one is conscious**. The axioms are the full expression of this ubiquitous fact.

The axiom of **Existence** states that **something exists**. This is the most basic fact of reality. It is simply the statement that there *is* reality; that whatever there is, *is, that whatever one perceives is there to be perceived*. One implication of this fact is that the word “nothing” can only be used in a relative, but not an absolute, sense. If we see an empty closet, then we may say “there is nothing in there.” But what we *mean* is that there is *nothing but* the closet, the air, and the space it occupies: that is still *something*, that is still some existent. Even the vacuum of outer space is an existent.²

The axiom of **identity** emphasizes another aspect of existence: that **a thing is what it is**. We may say that every existent *has* a nature, but in fact what we mean is that every existent *is* its nature.³ The axiom of identity is the recognition that existents exist in some definite way. To be something is to be something specific and determinate. There is nothing vague about reality, and nothing contradictory. The axiom of identity is the basis for the principles of logic by denying the existence of contradictions in reality. Ayn Rand described logic as “the art or skill of non-contradictory identification.”⁴ If you think about it, you will see that there is something wrong in the very *idea* of a “contradiction in reality.” We can have contradictory *ideas*, when we think of something as being one way, and not that way, at once. But a thing could never both have and not have its nature: however a thing is, *is* its nature. In this way, the axiom of identity can be expressed in terms of the basic laws of logic:

- The “Law of Identity:” **A is A.**
- The “Law of Non-Contradiction:” **A thing cannot be A and not-A.**
- The “Law of the Excluded Middle:” **A thing must either be A or non-A.**

Logic is the skill of ensuring that our ideas conform to these basic aspects of reality.

Notice that neither axiom makes any specific statement about the nature of what exists. For example, the axiom of existence does not assert the existence of a physical or material world as opposed to a mental one. The axiom of identity does not assert that all objects are composed of form and matter, as Aristotle said. These things may be true, but they are not axiomatic; the axioms assert the simple and inescapable fact that whatever there is, it is and it is something. The axioms and their corollaries are not rich in specific content that would allow specific inferences. Rather, they are the context in which one thinks about specific content. Their primary role is methodological. Their most common use is as tests of the validity of an idea in the most general sense. The laws of logic, for instance, provide such a test.

The most basic fact that we experience is that we are aware of some existent. The axioms of existence and identity pertain to what we are aware of, while a third axiom, the axiom of **consciousness**, is the recognition that we are *aware*. From the first person perspective, this is the recognition that **I am conscious**. Of course, only self-conscious beings like ourselves could *recognize* that they were conscious, but the axiom refers to the actual presence of consciousness in any of its forms, from the simplest sensation to complex perceptions to conceptual knowledge of the highest order. Just as the axiom of identity asserts that things have identities, without specifying what those identities are, the axiom of consciousness asserts that one is in cognitive contact with something, regardless of what form that contact takes. But in any of its forms, consciousness is always the awareness of something. To be conscious of nothing is to be unconscious. There is always some content of which one is aware. This fact is evident in any experience of being conscious.

Before we consider any other axiomatic statements, let us pause to clarify the epistemological status of axioms as such. It is a source of considerable confusion in philosophy in general, and even among Objectivists. Axioms have two essential features that we need to discuss: they are *self-evident* and they state *fundamental* facts.

To say that a proposition is self-evident is to say that it asserts a fact that we can perceive directly. As you read these pages, for example, it is self-evident that the printed characters on the page before you are black. The proposition “The characters are black” is about a perceivable attribute (the color) of a perceivable object (the printed characters). The proposition simply puts into words, i.e., into a conceptual formulation, a certain fact of reality that you can see directly. There is no need to infer this fact from other facts of which we’re aware because we are already aware of this fact through direct perception. Such propositions are called perceptual judgments because they formulate the content of perceptual observation.

An axiom is not a perceptual judgment, because it is universal in scope. The axiom of identity, for example, is a proposition applicable to everything that exists. For that reason, many philosophers have assumed that axioms must have some basis other than sense perception. But Objectivism holds that axioms are self-evident in exactly the same way that perceptual judgments are: an axiom asserts a fact that can be directly perceived. To see why, consider again the perceptual judgment that the characters on this page are black. This judgment identifies the specific color of the characters, distinguishing them from objects with different colors. If you were looking elsewhere in your perceptual environment, you would make different perceptual judgments to identify the features of the things you see. But there are certain aspects of what you see, looking at the characters, that would not be different if you looked elsewhere. One feature is the simple fact that the characters are *there*. They exist. If you looked elsewhere you would see different things but they, too would exist. Whatever you perceive, whatever kind of thing it may be, it will always be true that it is. That single word—it *is*—describes the common, invariant fact of existence. This fact is what the axiom asserts, and it can be validated in any act of awareness.

The same is true for the axiom of identity. Each of the characters on the page has a specific identity, a specific shape and color. If you look elsewhere, you will see things that have different shapes, color, and other attributes. But now try to imagine seeing something that has no identity at all, something with no shape, no color, no properties whatever. It's impossible to imagine such a thing—there's literally nothing there to imagine. Whenever we perceive our environment, we are aware of something specific. That is what the axiom of identity asserts, and that fact, like the fact of existence, can be validated in any act of awareness.

Finally, consider your awareness of the printed characters. Certain aspects of your awareness are distinctive to this situation. Perhaps your eyes are tired and the characters a little blurry. They appear a certain way to you, determined by the lighting, your distance from the page, and other factors. In a different context, your experience would be quite different. But one thing that would not change is the fact that you are aware. Regardless of the nature and content of your conscious experience, you are conscious of something. This is what the axiom of consciousness asserts.

In other words, the axioms are like perceptual judgments except that they formulate what we perceive in much more general terms, terms applicable to *anything* we might perceive. That universal character is the source of the second major feature of axioms: their fundamentality. The facts of existence, identity, and consciousness are features of reality contained in all other facts, so they can't be analyzed in terms of those other facts. In the same way, the axioms of existence, identity, and consciousness are implicit in all of our knowledge,

and so cannot be derived from any prior knowledge. Any effort to prove them by inference from other facts would be circular. How, for example, would you prove that there is something that exists? What evidence would you cite? Whatever the evidence might be, it would have to be something that *exists*. Again, how would you prove that you are conscious? What prior knowledge could you offer? Since knowledge is a form of consciousness, your “proof” would presuppose the fact you are trying to establish.

The inability to prove the axioms does not make them arbitrary. As we have seen, they are self-evident, founded directly on perceptual awareness. But there is a further point to be noted. The axioms are unprovable because they are fundamental. They state bedrock metaphysical facts and so they are implicit in all other knowledge: they are inescapable. And this feature of inescapability means that the axioms cannot coherently be denied. The person who asserts that nothing exists, for example, is taking for granted that he and his statement exist. The person who denies that he is conscious is exercising consciousness in that very act. And, as Aristotle first pointed out, the person who denies the law of non-contradiction—i.e., who asserts that contradictions exist—is implicitly assuming that his own statement to that effect is true and not at the same time false. In other words, the act of denying the axioms actually reaffirms them.

The fact that one can’t deny the axioms without reaffirming them is a sign of the fundamentality of the axioms and their inescapability. In pointing this out, however, we are not giving a proof that the axioms are true. Such a “proof” would beg the question. How could we offer a proof without assuming that we and our statements exist, that we are conscious, and that contradictions can’t exist—the very axioms to be supported? It is a classic error that many people make in discussing the axioms of Objectivism to think that they have proven them through such arguments. The proper response to someone who denies the axioms is to refuse to engage in argument or discussion until he acknowledges the basic presuppositions on which all argument and discussion—and indeed all knowledge—depend.

A corollary of the axioms of existence, identity, and consciousness is the principle known as the *Primacy of Existence*. Consciousness is an active process of identifying and grasping facts of reality. We are all aware that we are unable to make reality conform to our thoughts, that “wishing won’t make it so.” We cannot even originate the basic contents of our minds. Awareness is always awareness of some content. As Ayn Rand put it: “A content-less state of consciousness is a contradiction in terms.”⁵ The primacy of existence asserts that reality exists independently of our awareness of it, and that consciousness is metaphysically passive: its own contents depend on what exists in reality.

Of course, a normal person’s mind contains both items of awareness that clearly are of reality, and others, such as dreams and fantasies, that do not appear to be clearly connected to facts. Because of this, many philosophers

have thought it to be an open question whether the contents of the mind originate in reality, or in consciousness. The most thorough exponent of the latter view, that of the primacy of consciousness, is Immanuel Kant, but the idea that reality might conform to the mind has had a currency preceding and extending beyond Kant's influence. The primacy of consciousness, however, is not supported by dreams, by the human power of imagination, or by the occurrence of other subjective states. On reflection, we can see that even our imaginings are built up of the stuff of experience. Our dreams partake of the shapes, colors, and sounds of reality, in a confused mixture. The reason they do so is that they are built up out of the experience we have of reality. For instance, one may dream of a strange house, or an endless-seeming fall, or any number of odd experiences, but one can easily see that these are recombinations and reinterpretations of the kinds of experiences we have already had: experience of houses, falling, and so on.

The primacy of consciousness, moreover, is subject to the same self-refutation as is the denial of any other axiomatic principle. A person who asserts that the facts of reality depend on his own consciousness is making a claim about the nature of consciousness and reality. He intends his claim to be taken as objective, not as a reflective of his own whim. After all, he is asserting that the primacy of existence is false—not just for him, but even for its adherents. So he is assuming that there are facts, and that the function of his mind is to grasp them as they really are, at least in his own case. And that's inconsistent with his assertion of the primacy of consciousness.

The primacy of existence is the basis for the objective orientation of our knowledge. As we will see, the fundamental criterion for knowledge is its connection to reality, not any internal criterion such as how good our ideas sound, or how coherently they fit together.⁶

To continue with our survey of the axioms: Ayn Rand described the axiom of **causality** as the axiom of identity applied to actions⁷. To understand what this means, we need to consider a further aspect of the basic nature of existence: existents exist in distinct, basic *categories*, none of which is precisely reducible to the others. The most basic category is the *entities*. Entities are existents that exist independently of other existents. A piece of iron is an entity, for example, as is a puff of air. By contrast, existents from other categories are aspects of entities or relationships among them.

Entities can be analyzed into *attributes*, such as shape and color, which exist only in entities. An attribute is not a component part that can exist independently. For example, the shape of a table is an attribute. By contrast, its parts, such as its legs, are themselves entities. We can separate the leg from the table, but we cannot remove the particular shape out of the table. *Relationships* exist among entities, as when a book is *on* the table, or the table stands *between* the sofa and the chairs. Entities also act, changing their identities over time.

Actions such as dances have their own identities, but they are always actions of some entity, e.g. a dancer. Those familiar with physics might think of the elementary particles as the most basic kind of existents, but elementary particles are actually entities, and like other entities, possess attributes, act, and stand in relation to other entities.⁸

Causality is the principle that **entities act in accordance with their natures**. Because actions are aspects of the entities that act, the actions are part of the identity of the entity. But the law of causality also says an action is not a primary, independent aspect of a thing's nature, unrelated to other aspects. The law says that any action depends on underlying attributes of the thing, such as its mass, material composition, and internal structure. This view of causality as a relationship between an entity and its actions comes from the Aristotelian tradition in philosophy, and is to be contrasted with the view, associated with David Hume, that causality is a relationship among events, such as the collision between two billiard balls and their subsequent motions. Of course an entity like a billiard ball does react to events in its environment, such as the impact of another ball. Nevertheless, it is still the entities that act, and their actions are determined by their natures. For example, billiard balls react to collisions as they do because they are rigid and spherical; an irregular blob of soft wax would react very differently. An event per se is not a causal agent but is simply a span of time in which entities act. Notice also that the ambient factors are the effects of other entities, and not the effect of an abstracted conception of those effects, such as the laws of physics. The laws of physics, and of science more generally, conceptualize the causal properties of entities. When a ball falls toward the ground, it is the gravitational power of the Earth that draws it down, not the law of gravity.

Because actions are determined by the nature of the entities that act, we can generalize from the actions of one entity to others of a similar nature. In other words: **the same entity, or an exactly similar one, will act in the same way in exactly similar circumstances**. This implication of the law of causality is sometimes referred to as the uniformity of nature, and it is what makes inductive reasoning possible. Scientists cannot test each and every sample of water in the world to determine the temperature at which it boils, but they don't need to. By testing a limited number of samples, and varying the conditions that might affect the boiling point, they determine that their experimental samples boil at 212 degrees in normal atmospheric pressure. The law of causality then allows the inference that all water in that condition will boil at the same temperature.

The uniformity of nature has sometimes been taken to imply the thesis of *determinism*: that all actions of all entities are determined by their own natures and by antecedent conditions in such a way that, if one could know the nature, position, and every other fact about each entity at one point in time, one could predict everything that would happen thereafter. The immense success of

physics and other branches of science in using local assumptions of determinism to explain various phenomena and create new technologies has given many people the impression that determinism is an axiom, that it is the law of causality. However, determinism is in fact more narrow than causality: some actions may be determined by antecedent conditions, but others may not. Speaking fundamentally, events do not proceed from other events, but arise out of the natures of the entities that act. It is a matter of the identity of the entities in question to what extent ambient factors matter. This is why understanding causes requires an investigation to determine the *relevant* causal circumstances.

For example, physics tells us that billiard balls move in a way that is rigidly necessitated by the impacts upon them in such a way as to conserve momentum. A living organism, however, has a vastly more complex internal structure, with the capacity to originate its own actions; for a plant or simple animal, an environmental condition serves as a stimulus to action but the actual energy fueling the action comes from within the organism. In the case of animals that possess consciousness, their internal conscious awareness of the environment and their conscious desires are the primary causes of actions. And in human beings, the self-conscious awareness of our mental states and operations adds a further layer in internal control of action. In the face of this enormous complexity and diversity in nature, the thesis of determinism makes too restrictive a claim. Any given entity's actions result from the interplay of its internal nature and its external circumstances, but the specific nature of this interplay is a matter for the sciences to investigate. All that the law of causality says as a philosophical axiom is that an entity's actions are governed by its nature, and that entities with the same nature will have the same capacities for action.

This point about causality is especially important to keep in mind in regard to the next and final axiom, the principle of *free will*. Just as the axiom of consciousness is stated from the first-person perspective from which we grasp it, so the fact of free will is stated in the first-person: I have choice. The statement expresses the recognition that one must initiate one's own actions as a first cause, a prime mover of oneself; and that one can control which actions one takes, choosing among possible alternatives. The basis of this control, in the Objectivist view, is the choice to think. When we carefully examine what is involved in making any choice, we see that the essence of our power of volition lies in the control of our attention. This includes the power to focus our minds in general, as opposed to letting them drift. It also includes the power to focus on one specific content of awareness rather than another—one specific idea, issue, question, person, action, or other object of conscious awareness.

Of course, free will does not mean that one's actions are causeless; rather they are caused by one's own volition, which is itself a capacity of human nature. Free will means being able to control and initiate certain actions; it does not entail a capacity to be unaffected by the world around one. One can choose

whether to exert one's muscles against gravity, but one cannot choose, as a mere act of volition, not to be affected by gravity. In the mental sphere, one can choose whether to solve an algebraic equation if one has that skill, but one cannot choose to acquire that skill without effort. One can choose how to respond to the loss of a major value, but one cannot choose whether to feel sorrow at the loss.

Free will is compatible with the law of causality as it is stated above in terms of the uniformity of nature. The capacity to initiate and control our thoughts, and thereby our actions, is a capacity that all human beings have in virtue of their natures. Indeed, we now know enough to say that humans possess this capacity in virtue of their highly developed nervous systems. When we exercise this power of choice, we ourselves, as entities, are the causes of our actions. But free will is *not* compatible with the narrower doctrine of determinism, which says that all actions are necessitated by antecedent factors in accordance with universal causal laws. If this were true, the outcome of every choice would be determined by previous states of mind and of the environment, which are in turn determined by even earlier states, tracing back to factors entirely outside the person's control, such as his genetic inheritance and the actions of his parents (and *their* parents, and theirs, etc.).

How do we know that free will exists and that determinism is false? Like any other axiomatic fact, free will is self-evident. We can directly observe the exercise of our capacity to initiate thought and choose among alternatives, though in this case the observation is introspective. Just as any object of awareness is an instance of existence and identity, and any act of awareness an example of consciousness, so any exercise of thought is an instance of choice, and we can directly identify it as such. When we focus our minds, we can be directly aware that we initiated the act and could have withheld the effort. When we choose to concentrate on a task at work, we can be aware that we could have chosen to think about an issue in our personal lives. When we are influenced by the kind of mental factor that determinists see as necessitating—say, a strong emotion—we can be aware that we allowed the feeling to affect us and could have chosen to be more objective.

As with the other axioms, too, this universality is a reflection of the *fundamental* character of free will. In the Introduction we drew a distinction between the perceptual level of cognition and the conceptual level. Perception is the direct and automatic awareness of objects present to the senses; conceptual thought involves the integration of perceptual data into new concepts and conclusions. Free will pertains specifically to the conceptual level (and like conceptual thought, as far as we know, it is limited to human beings)? The integrative processes of conceptual thought must be initiated by conscious effort, and they must be consciously directed in such a way as to avoid error and exclude subjective whims, biases, and preconceptions. If we could not control

our integrative processes volitionally, we could have no confidence in the validity of their products. In this respect, volition is a fundamental feature of conceptual thought, and the choice to think might also be described as the choice to be objective, to be governed by facts rather than whims.

In light of this fundamentality, free will cannot be proved. Any purported “proof” would beg the question by presupposing that we were free to evaluate the validity of the proof, just as any purported “proof” of the law of non-contradiction would presuppose that very law. As with the other axioms, proof is not needed, since the axiom of free will is self-evident: its truth can be observed directly. As with the other axioms, however, the fundamentality of the axiom means that it cannot be denied without self-contradiction: a person who denies free will is saying by implication that his own thought processes, including his belief in determinism, are determined by antecedent factors over which he has no direct control. He is saying that he can’t help being a determinist. Yet in arguing for that thesis, he is presupposing that he was free to evaluate the evidence for the thesis and that he accepts his conclusion because it is valid. In other words, the content of his conclusion is incompatible with the fact that he is trying to prove it—just as, when a person denies the axiom of consciousness, the content of his assertion is not compatible with the fact that he asserts it.

In spite of the axiomatic character of free will, it is quite common to meet people who deny it, or at least attempt to wiggle around it by arguing that what appears to be volition is merely an effect of deterministic causality. The main reason for this in modern times is the presumption that all actions can be explained by the causal properties exhibited by elementary particles when studied in isolation. Pursuing this theory rigorously has led to enormous advances in scientific theory and technology, especially in the past three centuries. Many people regard this view, which we might call the “Clockwork Universe” view, as equivalent to the view that the universe is intelligible.¹⁰ Either we are determined, they say, or it is *deuces wild*. But as we have seen, there is no need to equate causality with determinism. Furthermore, while it is one thing for science to explain away the traditional idea that light things fall more slowly than heavy things, it is quite another matter to attempt to explain away what is self-evident. Science proceeds by isolating factors precisely so that it can show — i.e. make it evident — whether a claim is true. One can test how objects fall in a vacuum, for example, to show that light things fall just as quickly as heavy things. But one cannot make evident a denial of something that is already evident. To deny that evidence, science must attempt to deny the validity of the most basic experience of the mind, while depending on the mind to recognize its new “evidence.”

Perception as the Basis of Knowledge

With the axioms established as a foundation and a set of methodological guidelines, we can now begin the validation of the rest of the Objectivist epistemology. The major tenets of the epistemology rest on facts about the world and about the nature of our cognitive faculties. Our goal is to understand the logical connections between these facts and the epistemological conclusions, so we will begin using the technique of logical diagrams described in the Introduction.

The central principle of the Objectivist epistemology is: *conceptual knowledge is only acquired by reason*¹¹ It is due to this fact, and the distinctive role of such knowledge in human life, that we recognize reason as the distinguishing characteristic of mankind; if it were not the case, this philosophy would need a new name. But what is the basis of this principle? How would one go about establishing it? We need to examine the features of knowledge in order to ascertain why reason is its only source, and the features of reason to ascertain why it is suited to this role.

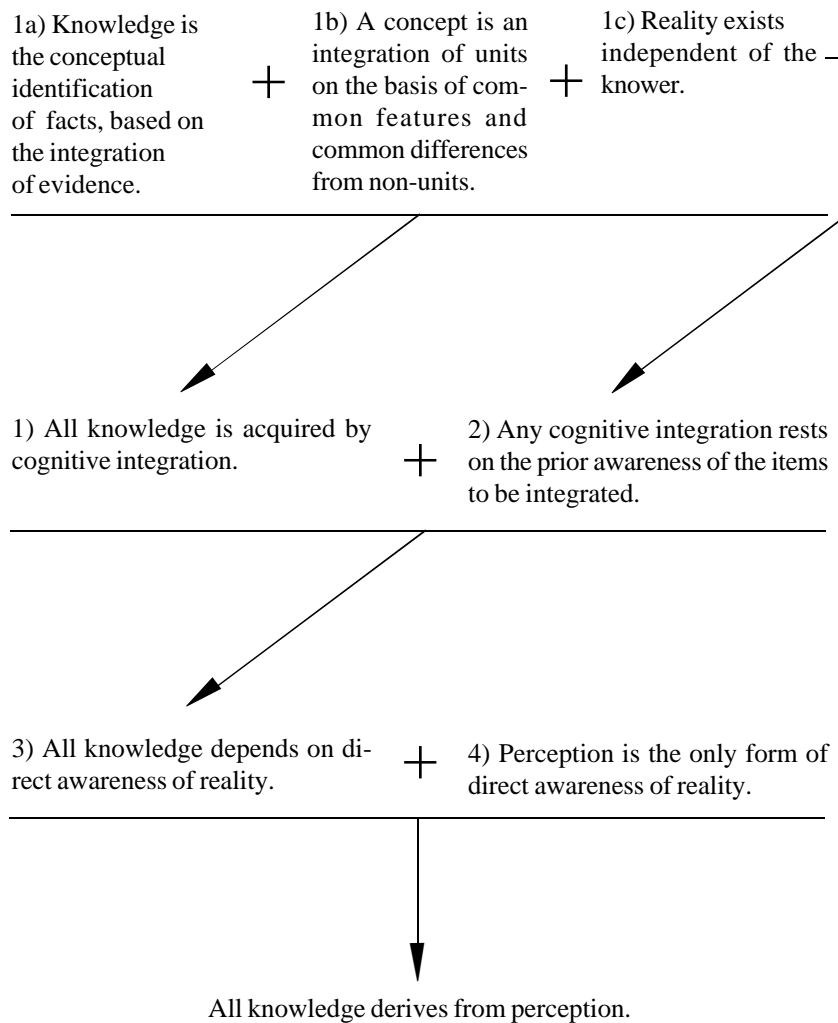
Our point of departure is the recognition that knowledge is acquired by conscious integration, which is stated as **Premise 1** of Diagram 1.2. When we discussed this point in the Introduction, we appealed to common sense, but we can now make its logical basis explicit: conceptual knowledge is abstract. Even when our knowledge is concerned with a particular thing in reality, as when we identify that a certain person is sick, what we know is that the individual has a certain abstract property, sickness. Yet we can observe introspectively that we have no direct perceptual awareness of abstractions. This is an inductive basis of a negative kind.

There is also a positive inductive basis. In the Introduction we listed some of the cognitive processes by which we acquire knowledge. If you refer back to that list (page #*), you will see that the processes are of two types: inferences by which we generalize, draw conclusions, weigh evidence, and test theories; and concept-formation, by which we acquire new concepts for types of things and for their attributes, actions, and relationships. These two basic processes are formulated in Premises 1a and 1b, which offer definitions of knowledge and concepts, respectively. **Premise 1a** says that **knowledge is the conceptual identification of facts, based on the integration of evidence**; and **Premise 1b**, that **a concept is an integration of units on the basis of common features and common differences from non-units**. These two premises are the logical basis for asserting that knowledge as such is acquired by cognitive integration, and both of them are starting points in the diagram because they are generalizations from what is directly observed. Premise 1b should be understood in the context of the Objectivist theory of concepts, as formulated by Ayn Rand in her *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*.¹² There, she wrote: “A

concept is a mental integration of two or more units which are isolated according to a specific characteristic(s) and united by a specific definition"; our premise offers a more general but consistent definition.

Diagram 1.2: The Basis of Knowledge

Inductive evidence: 1a, 1b, 4: Introspection, neuroscience, psychology.



A concept is the form of thought we use to refer to many different, but similar, things as if they were the same. For example, people who understand the word “flight” have formed a concept that unites the motions of birds, airplanes, helicopters, pterodactyls, balloons, and other things that float in air, into a single idea based on their similarity. Notice that although all the individual machines and creatures that fly are distinct and different from one another, and although the motions they make while flying are not exactly the same, nevertheless the motions are all similar, within a limited range of difference. That range is the characteristic by which the units of the concept are distinguished from all other things. In the case of “flight,” the characteristic is motion through the air. Now, “flight” is a fairly broad concept, so motions as different as the floating of blimps, the flapping of small birds, and the soaring of rockets are included in it. By contrast, “flapping” is a narrower concept that pertains to a more limited range of similar actions than “flight” does.

When we use words, we mean things by them. Concepts are the means by which we do so. Words are concrete, perceptible markers we use to distinguish, remember, and communicate our concepts. Note that in the Objectivist view, a definition is like a guidebook to the units of a concept: it gives us essential, contextual information about the units that enables us to recognize them. The *meaning* of the concept is the units, the existents it refers to, not the definition. Thus, a concept’s definition can be refined as our knowledge increases and our needs change, while the meaning of the concept stays the same. The development of definitions is natural and quite common. A child, for example, may at one age define a fish as “a creature that swims,” and only later incorporate knowledge of scales, gills, and cold-bloodedness into a new definition.

Defining our terms ensures that we understand their significance. As we proceed through the structure of Objectivism, we will need to offer definitions of many concepts as they become relevant. This is why we began our analysis of knowledge with two definitions. Note that a definition is a kind of induction from evidence. Most definitions establish an essential characteristic on the basis of which an objectively similar group of things or events may be integrated. Some concepts, like “color” or “length” are so basic that one must grasp them ostensively. In such cases, the definition of the concept can only tell one where to look, as it were. In both cases, a definition is a guide in terms of one’s current context of knowledge that tells one how to determine which objects are subsumed under the concept, and which are excluded.

Ayn Rand wrote her longest non-fiction work on the theory of concepts alone. Some readers may wonder, then, why we do not include more of the details of the theory of concept-formation, and the proper use of language, in this work. We have restricted our treatment to the facts that the essential, logical structure of the philosophy requires. For instance, we will be relying on the fact that reason is the means to objective knowledge, and the fact that knowledge

has its basis in perception. But we will not be explicitly discussing the details of Rand's "measurement-omission" theory of concepts, because, although the theory represents a significant contribution to epistemology at the scholarly level, one does not need to grasp its fine points to understand the facts about cognition from which the rest of Objectivism follows.

Readers who debate the ideas of Objectivism, particularly in a university environment, will often encounter people who raise technical epistemological objections with the purpose of undermining the systematic conclusions we have just examined. In such encounters, it is important to bear in mind that the positive account of knowledge we have presented in this chapter is sufficient to provide the basis for logical inquiry and the further structure of the philosophy. More technical accounts cannot eliminate the evidence that underpins our basic conclusions in epistemology, and for this reason accounts of knowledge that differ with those conclusions will tend to be false or even self-refuting. This is why it is a useful technique in debates of this sort to recur to the systematic positive account, and confine technical dispute to the context of a rational explanation for the fact of knowledge (a skeptic, for example, is usually hard-put to defend his own theory rather than attack yours). Don't let your opponent shirk the responsibility of providing an adequate positive account of his own.

We have said that Premise 1 is supported inductively through Premises 1a and 1b. That's true, but it's not the whole story. We observe that our minds engage in certain processes of integration, and that the two main forms of integration are concept-formation and inference. But what tells us that these processes are *valid*, that they represent knowledge of reality rather than constructions of our own subjective devising, like dreams, wishes, and so on? This aspect of the three statements depends on the primacy of existence, which tells us that reality exists independently of the knower and that consciousness depends on reality for its contents. The primacy of existence is expressed in **Premise 1c** as **reality exists independent of the knower**. It is the axiom that one is aware of reality, and, as an axiom, it is self-evident rather than being inferred by induction. The inductive element in these statements concerns the *form* that integrative processes take.

The primacy of existence also has an implication regarding the data or cognitive material that is integrated by these processes. To integrate, we must integrate something. At higher levels of knowledge, we often form concepts from earlier concepts we already possess, and draw conclusions from earlier conclusions we have already reached. If we were not concerned about reality, the processes of integration could extend onward without limit, in an infinite chain; or they could circle back on themselves so that concepts and conclusions mutually support each other without any foundation. But this would leave our knowledge hanging in mid-air, unconnected with reality. The primacy of existence, however, tells us that our knowledge is and must be connected with real-

ity. This key implication is stated as **Premise 2: any cognitive integration rests on the prior awareness of the items to be integrated.** If we form one concept from earlier concepts, those latter concepts must already have been validly formed by a prior process of integration, and similarly with conclusions inferred from earlier conclusions. Ultimately, then, our concepts and conclusions must trace back to some form of direct cognitive contact with reality that is not itself the result of a process of integration. The obvious conclusion to be drawn from Premises 1 and 2 is that **all knowledge depends on direct awareness of reality**, which is stated in the diagram as **Premise 3.**

Premise 4 asserts that **perception is one's only form of direct awareness of reality.** This is another inductive claim, the evidence for which is also primarily introspective. We observe that perception is the mode of awareness in which we grasp objects directly, automatically, without cognitive integration. However, scientific evidence of the nature of our senses and their physiological basis helps us to better analyze and understand the modalities of perception and the processes that underlie them. We have sensory awareness of our selves and surroundings in three broad forms: 1) Exteroception is the awareness of things and events in the external environment through sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell. 2) Proprioception is the awareness of the location, orientation, and movements of one's own body. This is the sense that allows us to reach out in a certain direction in the dark, for example. 3) Enteroception is the awareness of pain, hunger, thirst, and other internal conditions of the body. Each of these give us the awareness of existents, an awareness that has been automatically integrated to varying degrees before we are consciously aware of it.

Some philosophers and scientists have attempted to characterize our senses as providing momentary, disintegrated flashes of data, as when one has a general, poorly localized pain. In this view, our sight presents us with color patches, not entities. Our hearing gives us isolated impressions, not the patterns of vibrations that make up sound. This is incorrect. It is true that our perception involves receptors that respond to light, vibrations, chemical structure, and so on. Indeed, if it did not involve some causal interactions with its objects, it could hardly make us aware of them. We are not aware of our receptors, however, but rather of the objects and actions toward which our awareness is directed. The evidence of this is available to anyone who attends to his perceptual awareness.¹³

There are also two important philosophical objections to the validity of our external perceptual awareness. The first is the Kantian objection, often called the *argument from perceptual relativity*. This is commonly encountered in the following form: "We don't see things the way they really are. You see a solid table, but it's really mostly empty space." The reply to this is that one must perceive things by some means, in some *form*. The form of perception derives from the interaction of our senses with the natures of objects of awareness. The

same object may be perceived in any number of forms. For instance, in the daylight a tree may appear green, and the pattern of its bark may be evident. At night, it is a dark, rustling shadow. In both cases, the tree is what it is, and its form is the way it appears given one's means of perception and the effects of the environment (in this case, the availability of light). Similarly, while people get their clearest perception of objects through sight, bats get theirs through an extraordinarily integrated hearing and echo-location sense. Nevertheless, both a bat and person perceive an object such as a tree in a way that gives each of them awareness of the tree's characteristics. More generally, any perception is of its object, though different perceptions can occur through different modalities.¹⁴

The second objection, known as the *argument from hallucination*, is that our experience may simply be disconnected from reality: "How do you know you're not dreaming?" The reply to this is that one only knows what dreams are by contrast with one's perceptual experience of reality. Dreams are strikingly insubstantial, in a way that perception clearly is not. Indeed, one would not think of dreams as unusual, were one not aware of the radically objective awareness one gains through perception.

In the case of both objections, a person who upholds them does so in contradiction to his own experience and actions. After all, in daily life he depends on his perception in order to know facts and to get around. If someone is unwilling to recognize this fact, he is not likely to benefit from extended debate on the subject.

In saying that sense perception is our only form of direct awareness of reality, we do not of course mean to deny the validity of introspection. Just as our knowledge of external reality begins with direct perceptual awareness, which we then integrate into concepts and then into propositional knowledge, so our knowledge of our inner conscious life begins with the direct introspective awareness of experiences, thoughts, and feelings, which we then integrate into concepts of consciousness and propositional knowledge. As objects of self-knowledge, experiences, thoughts, and feelings are of course part of reality: they exist and have specific identities, they are subject to causal law, and our knowledge about them is subject to the same standards of logic and objectivity as any other knowledge. Nevertheless, as conscious phenomena, they involve the awareness of things in external reality. We must perceive external reality first before we can introspect on our perceptions. As Ayn Rand put it, "A consciousness conscious of nothing but itself is a contradiction in terms: before it could identify itself as consciousness, it had to be conscious of something."¹⁵ Thus introspection, while direct, is dependent on sense perception. It is an instance of our conclusion that all knowledge derives from perception, rather than an exception to it.

The premise that perception is our only form of direct awareness does,

however, deny the existence of other alleged modes of direct awareness. It denies the existence of *revelation*, usually conceived as the direct awareness of some aspect of reality by some means other than sense-perception. Mystics have spoken about experiencing God directly, about communing with other minds without benefit of speech, and about seeing into the future. Some philosophers have spoken of grasping abstract principles of logic, morality, or other areas by some sort of intellectual intuition. Many people believe in the existence of “extra-sensory” perception in forms such as telepathy.

The problem with these claims is that there is no inductive evidence to support them. The primary inductive evidence we have available is introspection, and we simply do not observe such phenomena. Even those who claim to have had experiences that they consider to be extra-sensory or mystical cannot deny that such experiences are fleeting, rare, and fragmentary by comparison with the torrent of perceptual experience that floods our conscious awareness during every waking moment. Those who make such claims, moreover, have the burden of explaining what causes them. But no one has ever provided such an explanation. The various modes of alleged revelation do not involve any known neural receptors, nor are they a response to any known form of physical energy in the environment. Nor can these revelations be produced reliably by any known process.

Normally, we should consider these claims to be purely scientific issues. After all, if there were evidence for some new form of perception or sensation, this would not change the fact that our knowledge is based on direct evidence of reality, in whatever form we acquire it. E.S.P. and other forms of revelation become philosophically significant because they often serve as a cover for people who deny the dependence of the conceptual level on perception. Mystical knowledge, for instance, is often claimed to be conceptual in form, but not obtained through any process of integration. Such an ineffable, intuitional form of “awareness” is not perception at all, but merely an excuse to treat conceptual notions, wishes, and fantasies as if they were facts. This amounts to denying the primacy of existence.

From premises 3 and 4 we have our **conclusion: all knowledge derives from perception**. The entire edifice of our knowledge of reality is built on the evidence of our perceptual awareness of objects present to our senses. We will recur to this conclusion many times as we examine the structure of Objectivism. Along with the other points demonstrated in diagram 1.2, as we will see, it gives us the essential basis for our main conclusion that knowledge derives from reason.

While our conclusion was deduced from the premises in Diagram 1.2, those premises were based on inductive evidence. Our conclusion draws on that inductive support. It has been argued, however, that instincts represent inductive evidence *against* our conclusion. It seems undeniable that animals are born

with innate knowledge not learned from perceptual experience: how to build nests and rear their young, what sort of food to eat. Humans also seem to have such knowledge, though perhaps on a lesser scale. Infants instinctively seek their mother's breast, avoid heights, and blink when objects approach their eyes, suggesting that they are born with some knowledge of what is good and bad for them. In responding to this objection, it is important to distinguish knowledge from automatic behavior patterns. The concept of knowledge refers to the conscious grasp of a fact and to the retained products of conscious processing (e.g., we all know that George Washington was the first American president even when we are not thinking about him, because we have retained that knowledge from some initial learning experience). Much of our behavior, and many of the skills exhibited in that behavior, are guided by conscious knowledge, but this is not true across the board.

Instinctive patterns of behavior reflect inborn capacities to respond to the environment without the mediation of knowledge, presumably as a result of "hard-wired" connections in our nervous systems. They are examples of the wider phenomenon of adaptive behavior in all plants and animals. When we observe adaptive behavior in any living organism, it is legitimate to ask for an explanation. But the attribution of knowledge as the cause is only one possible explanation, and precisely because we know that all knowledge derives from perception, we know that this explanation is not valid in the case of inborn patterns. There simply is no way an infant, for example, could have the conscious thought "Mother's milk is good for me" without perceiving mother and milk, and without the much more extensive experience and cognitive integration necessary to form the concept "good."

Knowledge is Hierarchical and Contextual

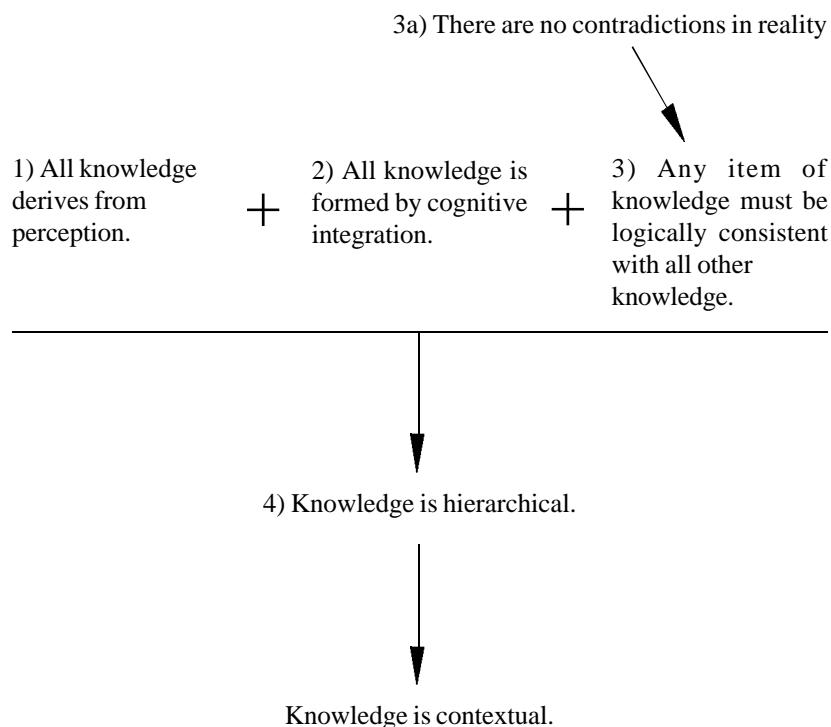
As we noted in the Introduction, Objectivism holds that conceptual knowledge is hierarchical and contextual in character. What is the logical basis for these claims?

As the discussion in the Introduction indicated, the fact that knowledge is hierarchical follows from the fact that it is derived from a perceptual base by means of cognitive integration. Conceptual knowledge is hierarchical in the first place simply because it is *abstract*. Concepts are integrated from the data of the senses and thus subsume a wide range of existents. Conclusions that employ those concepts rely on a wide variety of evidence, also drawn from perception. In this sense concepts and conclusions as such are distinct from and stand upon perceptual awareness. That in itself is a hierarchical characteristic.

However, when Objectivists note that knowledge is hierarchical, they mean also that different items of conceptual knowledge stand in a hierarchical

relationship to each other. Any area of knowledge provides many examples to support this generalization. To take a simple example from everyday life, one's knowledge that the car needs gas is based on a structure of background knowledge about internal combustion, the meaning of the fuel gauge, and other facts about automobiles. In philosophy, to take a more abstract example, one cannot discuss the theory of politics without first establishing or assuming some ethical basis. This is because politics is concerned with the question of which political and legal institutions are required by man's nature and his fundamental values—a matter of ethics. The material integrated by politics includes the integrations of ethics, a prior body of abstract concepts, propositions, and theories. So knowledge is also hierarchical in the sense it includes abstractions from abstractions. The trail that leads from a given integration back to the perceptual level may pass through several intermediate integrations.

Diagram 1.3: Hierarchy and Context



The logical basis for the conclusion that knowledge is hierarchical is represented in Diagram 1.3:

Premise 1 is the conclusion we derived in the previous section. The fact that **all knowledge derives from perception** means that it rests on a foundation. **Premise 2**, which we employed in showing why knowledge has a perceptual base, is relevant in this argument as well because it tells us how the rest of the structure is built upon the foundation. **All knowledge is formed by cognitive integration**—of units into concepts and of evidence into conclusions. To make clear the nature of this integration, and to rule out random or arbitrary integration, we must add **Premise 3: any item of knowledge must be logically consistent with all other knowledge**. That's because **there are no contradictions in reality (Premise 3a)**, which we know from the axiom of identity. Contradictory conclusions cannot both be true, and thus cannot both be knowledge. The implication of these premises is that our **knowledge is hierarchical** (Premise 4). It is not a collection of cognitive atoms standing alone. It is not a floating system of mutually reinforcing beliefs. It is a structure built upon our perceptual awareness of reality through successive integrations governed by logic. This is the full meaning of the term “hierarchical” in the context of the Objectivist epistemology.

A further implication is that **knowledge is contextual, a conclusion** we can infer directly from Premise 4. As we observed in the introduction, the fact that knowledge is built up by successive steps of concept-formation and inference means that the content of any concept or conclusion is related to reality through those steps.

The meaning of these products of integration depends on the integrative processes by which they were produced. The meaning of a concept, for example, is its units: the things it refers to in reality. But we grasp and integrate those units through an active process in which we note their similarities to each other and their differences from other things. Except for the first concepts that we form directly from perceptual observation, we rely on existing concepts in the process of forming new ones. This body of perceptual data and of other concepts constitutes the context of a given concept, and the latter cannot be detached from that context without losing its connection to reality.

In the same way, a conclusion is based on the integration of evidence, and except for the perceptual judgments we form directly from observation, our conclusions rest on intermediate conclusions in a series of inferences tracing back to perceptual data. Those intermediate conclusions, and the whole body of perceptual data on which they rest, along with all the concepts employed in those conclusions, form the context of a given conclusion. The conclusion cannot be detached from its context and still count as an item of knowledge, a grasp of a fact. Over time, moreover, as we acquire more knowledge, information that is relevant to an already established conclusion becomes part of its context.

Because any item of knowledge must be consistent with all other knowledge, new information must be integrated in a logically consistent way with old conclusions; the meaning and validity of such a conclusion is a function of its *full* context, new and old. When the boiling point of water was first shown to be 212 degrees Fahrenheit, for example, the effect of atmospheric pressure was not known. The conclusion therefore did not specifically include the qualification “at sea level.” Now, that qualification is part of the content of the claim.

We have now surveyed the major Objectivist tenets regarding the nature of knowledge: it is based on perception, formed by cognitive integration, logically consistent, hierarchical, and contextual. On this basis, we are now in a position to show why knowledge can be acquired only by *reason*.

Reason and Objectivity

Objectivism employs the term “reason” in both of its two conventional senses: as a process of thinking (“reasoning”) and as the human capacity for such thought. The obvious and most widely understood aspect of this thought process is its use of logic, both induction and deduction. Reasoning means thinking in accordance with logic. (Of course, one does not need to know the discipline of formal logic in order to think in accordance with it: any child can figure out that a thing that barks is a dog — since only dogs bark— without training in the syllogism. Formal logic codifies in abstract terms the kinds of connections that we grasp when we think logically.) So reason is, in part, our capacity for such thought.

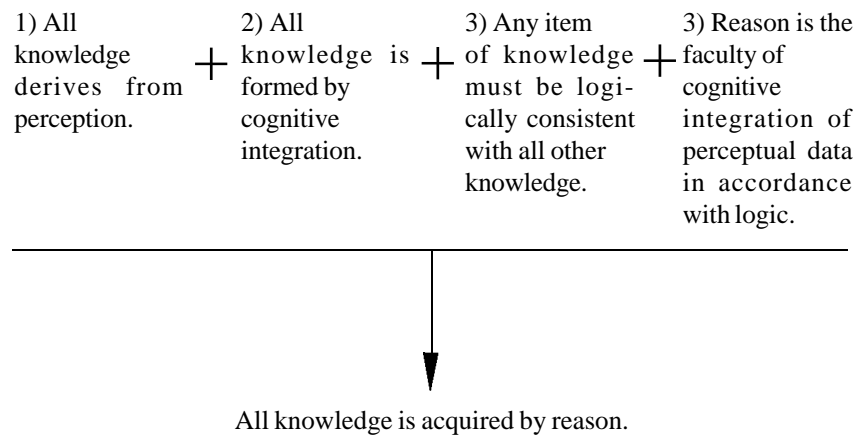
We have seen, however, that logical inference is only one of two main integrative processes by which knowledge is acquired, the other being concept-formation. Without concepts, we could not form the propositions that are the units of logical reasoning. Thus reason must be understood more broadly—and more fundamentally— as the faculty of conceptual integration in accordance with logic. And since the only basic data available for such integration come from the senses, we can define reason as **the faculty of conceptual integration of perceptual data in accordance with logic**.

This definition is **Premise 4** in Diagram 1.4, which shows why all knowledge is acquired by reason:

Premises 1, 2, and 3 state previous conclusions that we have reached about the nature of knowledge. In effect, they specify conditions that a faculty must meet if it is to provide us with knowledge. Premise 4 shows why reason is the faculty that meets those conditions. If we consider conceptual knowledge as the product of a process, then reason is the faculty that performs that process. It is no accident that the same three basic ideas—a perceptual basis, cognitive integration, and logical consistency—are essential to our understanding both of knowledge and of reason. Nor is it the result of arbitrary stipulation on our part.

Ultimately, our understanding of knowledge as a product and of reason as a process rest on the same inductive observations about our cognitive functioning. The conclusion that all knowledge is acquired by reason simply states the harmony of process and product.

Diagram 1.4: Knowledge and Reason



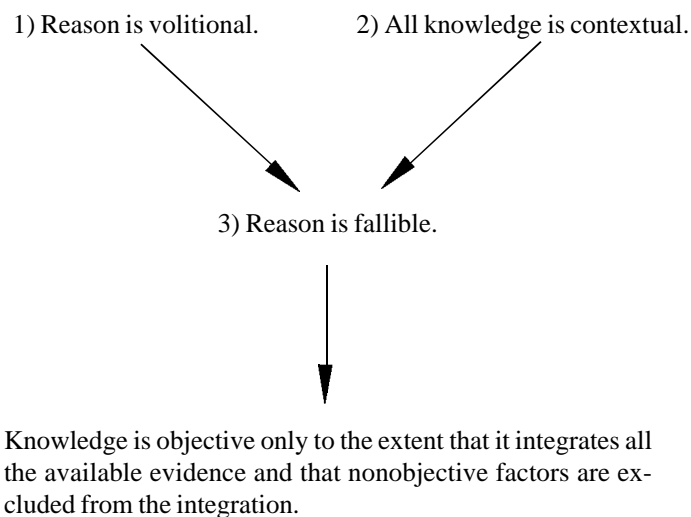
So far, we have discussed the properties of knowledge as a product of cognitive integration, and the features of reason that relate directly to those properties. But reason has another important epistemological feature as a process of cognition: the fact that it is fallible.

This fact gives rise to the need for two crucial concepts in epistemology: truth and objectivity. Because we are capable of making errors in reasoning, our conclusions do not necessarily conform to the facts. Conceptual knowledge is different in this respect from perceptual awareness, which is an automatic product of the interaction between the environment and our senses. The content of perceptual awareness necessarily reflects the totality of the causal factors operating in that interaction, and thus cannot be erroneous or false.¹⁶ At the conceptual level, however, cognitive integration is not an automatic process and the content of our conclusions can be false. We therefore need the concepts of truth and falsity to distinguish success from failure in the pursuit of knowledge.

We also need the concept of objectivity as the hallmark of the *process* required to achieve success. The core meaning of objectivity lies in its contrast with subjectivity. Objectivity means adhering to the facts rather than to biases and preconceptions. It means operating by a logical method rather than by whim.

It means grounding our concepts and conclusions in the evidence rather than accepting uncritically the products of received tradition or of our own imaginations. To form a more precise definition of objectivity, however, we need to understand the causes of error, the particular factors that make reason fallible. The claim that reason is fallible is so richly supported by inductive evidence, by the countless errors each of us has made or seen others make, that it hardly needs further support to establish its truth. The deductive inferences in the upper portion of Diagram 1.5, however, are important in explaining *why* reason is fallible, and this explanation has an important bearing on our understanding of objectivity.

Diagram 1.5: Reason and Objectivity



The first line of argument is a straightforward. We have already seen that **reason is volitional (Premise 1)**. This is the axiom of free will. We are therefore subject to errors that arise from the exercise of volition. We can come to erroneous conclusions because we have failed to exert the effort to think in the first place, i.e., to maintain a sufficient level of conscious focus. We can err because we failed to embrace knowledge as our highest cognitive goal, subordinating it to some other goal such as agreement with others. We can err by evading relevant evidence, ignoring facts that we prefer not to consider, overlooking a weakness in an argument, or being unwilling to contradict an esteemed belief. In all these ways, the existence of volition implies that **reason is fallible (Premise 3)**.

Another source of error is the fact that **knowledge is contextual (Premise 2)**. What this means, as we saw in discussing the contextual theory of knowledge, is that our concepts are connected to their units in reality, and that our conclusions are connected to the facts of reality, through a complex process of integration. This process is liable to error in many ways other than willful evasion. Conceptual abstraction involves decisions about which factors among one's experience are relevant, and which of those are essential. It is not a process that is easily reduced to a formula. To give more inductive content to this point, let's consider some of the ways in which mistakes can arise:

One may not know, or no one may have discovered, all the proper methods to solve a problem or determine the truth of an idea. Logical thinking is a skill that must be mastered and refined, and one can make mistakes because the level of one's skill is not adequate to the cognitive task at hand.

One may not have considered all the relevant alternatives. One may not have tested all the factors that could have caused a given effect. One may not have considered all the hypotheses that could explain a given phenomenon.

One may not be aware of an important fact that would affect the conclusion. No one is omniscient. Nothing guarantees that all the relevant facts will be available to us, and nothing guarantees that we can always know when a relevant fact is missing.

Objectivity thus results both from the exercise of a choice and from the exercise of a skill. Because it is an attribute of the process of cognition rather than the product, it is not the same thing as truth, and because of the factors just mentioned, an objective process can still result in a false conclusion. Nevertheless, we must define objectivity in light of the factors that give rise to the fallibility of reason. *Objectivity is the voluntary adherence to the facts of reality as the exclusive data of integration and to the methods of logic in the process of integration.* Knowledge is objective only to the extent that one has correctly attended to the context of evidence behind a judgment, and one knows that the chain of inference that leads to one's conclusion is not distorted by evasion, prejudice, wishful thinking, or other non-objective factors. With this concept of objectivity in hand, we can see why the fallibility of reason implies the conclusion of our diagram: **knowledge is objective only to the extent that it is based on evidence and that one has excluded nonobjective factors from the integration.**

Emotions and Reason

Diagram 1.4 concludes that all knowledge is acquired by reason. This means not only that we *can* acquire knowledge by means of reason but also that knowledge can be acquired *only* by reason—that reason is the only source of knowledge. This is the significance of the Objectivist idea that reason is an

absolute.

How do we know that no other method or faculty can produce knowledge? Since this is a negative claim, it can be established only by considering alternative methods, although the burden of proof lies with those who make the positive claim that some alternative method can meet the conditions for objective knowledge. We have already considered some of the alternatives—revelation and instinct—urged most frequently by those who deny the absolutism of reason and we have seen why they are not in fact sources of knowledge. But there is one remaining alternative we should consider: emotion. A central tenet of the Objectivist epistemology is that emotions are not forms or tools of cognition. What is the basis for this tenet?

It is important at the outset to deal with a frequent source of confusion. Unlike revelations or instinctive knowledge, emotions certainly exist; they are pervasive and highly important features of conscious experience. As real phenomena, they can be known, and they are important barometers of one's state of mind and the condition of one's life. We shall have much to say later about happiness, for example, in this light. Knowledge about what we are feeling is acquired like any other knowledge—by observation (in this case introspective) and by rational analysis of what we observe. So there is no doubt that, as *objects* of knowledge, emotions provide important data about our inner reality, just as the objects present to our senses provide important data about external reality. But this does not mean that the emotions themselves are forms of knowledge. The fact that I am angry at what I see as a friend's hostility to me is an important fact for me to know about myself. But the anger *per se* does not prove that the friend actually was hostile.

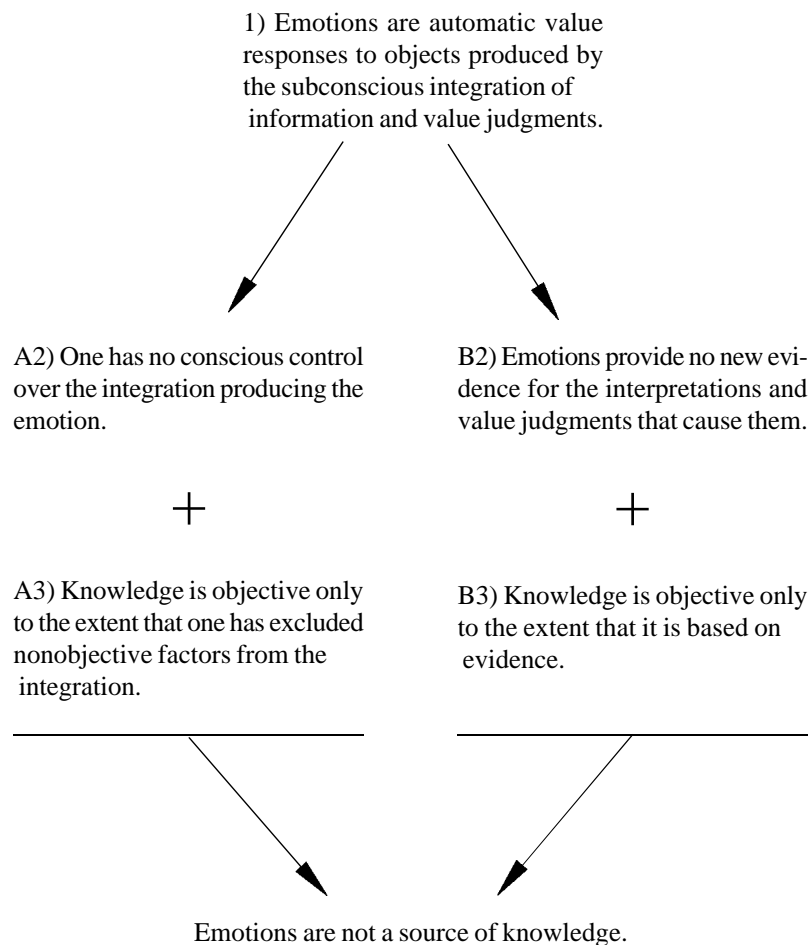
To establish the relationship between reason and emotion, we need to rely on an analysis of what emotions are, an analysis that is supported inductively by the introspective evidence available to all of us as well as by the more systematic studies of psychologists. An emotion is a value-response, a feeling that something is good or bad (i.e. a benefit or a threat). It is based on the way we interpret a person, object, or event in light of our background knowledge and value premises. The interpretation is performed by our minds subconsciously and automatically and the result is experienced as a feeling.

We can summarize these points in the definition offered as **Premise 1** of Diagram 1.6: **Emotions are automatic value responses to objects produced by the subconscious integration of information and value judgments.** One may be conscious of the value premise causing an emotion, as for instance when one feels a rush of fear after a close call on the highway, or one may not clearly understand the cause, as when one finds oneself feeling irritated with a close friend even though he has done nothing unusual. But the emotion itself is an automatic response. Even if the value premise involved is conscious, the interpretation and evaluation of the object occur by subconscious integration,

not by conscious deliberation and choice.

The emotional significance of the same event may differ depending on one's premises. Suppose you have just been passed over for a promotion at work in favor of Jane, despite the fact that you have superior qualifications. Jane isn't very competent or bright, but she does golf with the boss. If your subconscious premise is the principle that people should be treated in accordance with merit, you will feel outrage at Jane's promotion. But if your premise is that people should be equal, and that those with more ability should be expected to shoulder a heavier burden, you may be resigned to Jane's advance, or

Diagram 1.6: Emotions and Reason



even feel satisfaction at it. If you, too, have been trying to cultivate a taste for golf in the hopes it will propel you up the corporate ladder, you may envy Jane, or feel admiration for her skill at currying favor.

Because emotions are automatic responses to objects, they have the same immediacy and authority that sense perception has, the same feeling of self-evidence. Sometimes an emotion is powerful enough to evoke memories, images or ideas that we can take for well-founded premises. Probably everyone has had the experience of making an argument that “rings true” in the heat of passion, only to realize later, when one reconsiders it calmly, how ill-founded and weak it is. Why isn’t the feeling of authority one gets from an emotion a substitute for—or at least an equal companion to—reasoned thought? The answer, implicit in the nature of emotions, is spelled out in diagram 1.6.

There are two chains of inference that lead to the conclusion that emotions cannot be tools of cognition, and they are depicted in the diagram as (A) and (B), respectively. Both depend on the need for knowledge to be objective, though each appeals to a different aspect of that need. Chain (A) follows from the fact that one cannot control one’s emotions directly. Chain (B) follows from the fact that emotions do not, in themselves, provide new and objective information.

Let’s look at Chain (A) first. Premise A2 states that **one has no conscious control over the integration that produces an emotion**. This is because the integration is subconscious and automatic. Because it is not subject to direct voluntary control, one cannot deliberately exclude non-objective factors. One does not decide whether to feel an emotion, or what emotion to feel, in any immediate fashion. At best, one can attempt to ignore an emotion, or focus on matters other than those producing the emotion, as when one “thinks happy thoughts” to reduce a feeling of grief or distress. But the latter is a matter of altering what one attends to, not altering the integration behind the emotion.¹⁷

In this respect, emotions cannot meet the standard of objectivity we established in Diagram 1.5, specifically the point that **knowledge is objective only to the extent that one has excluded non-objective factors from the integration (Premise A3)**. Because one has no immediate control over one’s subconscious integrations, one cannot easily know whether one’s emotion reflects a non-objective bias of some kind, or not. In other words, when we combine premises A2 and A3, we can conclude by deduction that **emotions are not a source of knowledge**.

The second line of inference regarding emotions arises from that fact that **emotions provide no new evidence for one’s interpretations and value-judgments (Premise B2)**. Chain (B) combines this fact with a second aspect of objectivity, from the conclusion of Diagram 1.5, which is summarized in **Premise B3: reason is objective only to the extent that it is based on evidence**. Together these give us the same conclusion as Chain (A): emotions are not a source

of knowledge.

What is the basis for Premise B2? It follows from the way emotions integrate our knowledge and values. To the extent that an emotion is based on the products of past thinking, it obviously provides no new evidence for the truth of a conclusion. (Many of our subconscious value premises, moreover, were formed when we were children, too young to be consistent or reasonable in forming opinions.) To the extent that an emotion is based on current observation of reality, on the other hand, it may reflect new information. But there is still a difference between the information and the emotional reaction to it. For example, one might respond emotionally to some subtle aspect one has perceived in a person's tone of voice, but it is the perception rather than the emotion per se that provides that evidence about the person. Sometimes, an unexpected emotion may give you cause to re-evaluate a situation or check your premises, but that re-evaluation must still be done by reason on the basis of a rational identification of the evidence.

This analysis of emotion confirms the main conclusion of this chapter: that all knowledge is acquired by reason. If one wants to acquire knowledge, one must actively employ the methods of logic to ensure one's objectivity. This is a subject to which we will return once we have established the central place of reason in the structure of our values. At this stage, it would be premature to describe reason and objectivity as values, before we explain the nature of values more generally. What we can say now, not as a value judgment or normative statement but as a matter of fact, is that reason is the only process that will in fact produce knowledge of reality. This key principle of Objectivism may appear to be the merest common sense, but it has profound implications. In the chapters ahead, as we examine the evidence of the vital importance of knowledge to our values and our lives, we will return to this conclusion to identify man's essential characteristic and his means of survival.

Conclusion

We have now completed our survey of the basic logical structure of the Objectivist Epistemology, and established the meaning of reason, in the sense we intend to employ it. Reason is a theme that runs throughout Objectivism. Ayn Rand often characterized her philosophy simply as a "philosophy of reason," or "a rational philosophy." It is the philosophy that follows from employing the epistemic standards of reason, and that holds reason as the central value. All the virtues of the Objectivist Ethics concern some aspect of living as a rational being. If the ethics had to be reduced to a single principle, it would be: "*Live by reason.*"

Before we can proceed to *evaluate* reason, we must first attend to the context of that claim, to its hierarchical basis. We must establish the nature of

values. This is the subject of the foundations of ethics, to which we now turn.

- 1 Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* (New York: Random House, 1957) 1018
- 2 Just to be clear, philosophy says that outer space is some aspect of existents. This does not mean it is an entity, or is composed of entities such as “ether” particles. What it is composed of is a scientific question: current physics indicates that space may be a product of or relation among the entities, such as atoms and items of larger mass, of which the universe is composed.
- 3 The association of the idea of a “nature” with an entity is sometimes connected to the Aristotelian metaphysical distinction between substance and form. In the Objectivist usage, a thing’s nature is nothing more than its identity. No special metaphysical import is attached to the term.
- 4 Rand, “Philosophical Detection,” in *Philosophy Who Need It* p 17 Paperback p 15.
- 5 Ayn Rand, *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology, Expanded 2nd Edition*, eds. Harry Binswanger and Leonard Peikoff (New York: Meridien, 1979) Paperback p 29
- 6 See David Kelley, *The Evidence of the Senses* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), chap 1, for a fuller discussion of the primacy of existence.
- 7 Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* 1037.
- 8 The Objectivist conception of categories refines the Aristotelian conception. Given the Objectivist theory of concepts, the distinction that Aristotle makes between qualities and quantities seems inessential. Other Aristotelian categories, such as place and time, reduce to relations. This list of four categories is consistent with the usage of Ayn Rand in her writings.
- 9 That we think free will confined to human beings is a point with various technical aspects. Whether or not other animals of complex consciousness, such as dogs or monkeys, exercise some amount of control over their attention, it is debatable whether they do so self-consciously to any significant extent. Since the only direct evidence we have of free will is our own, and the only testimony of it from other conceptual beings, namely other people, it is only for these cases that the evidence is decided.
- 10 The classic modern “clockwork universe” view is that of LaPlace, who supposed that if one knew all the conditions in the universe at a given moment in time, one could then in principle predict the rest of history to come.
- 11 We are speaking here of conceptual knowledge as opposed to perceptual awareness. In the remainder of this book, we will restrict the term “knowl-

edge” to the conceptual level.

12 Rand, *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology, Expanded 2nd Ed.* David Kelley presents Rand’s theory of abstraction in a more scholarly context in his “A Theory of Abstraction,” *Cognition and Brain Theory* 1984 7(3&4), 329-357.

13 See David Kelley, *The Evidence of the Senses* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1986) for a detailed Objectivist account of perception.

14 *Ibid.* Chapter 3

15 Rand, *Atlas Shrugged 1015.*

16 See Kelley, *Evidence of the Senses*, 234-38

17 One can, of course, change one’s emotional response to an object. But this depends on changing the subconsciously integrated evaluation that generates the emotion. For an evaluative premise that one has accepted only abstractly, it may be relatively easy to change one’s response. For instance, having heard that a certain person is a murderer, one might view him with a revulsion that would be almost instantly dispersed if one were to decide that he was not a murderer at all, but an upstanding individual. On the other hand, most emotions arise from premises that are deeply ingrained in one’s subconscious, and thus not easy to change. In either case, one usually has no clear idea what causes the emotion, but rather one finds out by seeing what changes it. See e.g. Alan Blumenthal, “The Base of Objectivist Psychotherapy, Part II” *The Objectivist* 8,7 (New York: The Objectivist inc., 1969) reprinted in *The Objectivist* (Palo Alto: Palo Alto Book Service, 1982) 676-681. Other literature on changing emotions. Ellis? * . .



CHAPTER 2: LIFE AND NEEDS

Life as the Ultimate Value

Ethics is a body of universal principles that provide people with fundamental guidance in their choices. Plainly, moral principles are useful only to beings of conceptual consciousness, who can grasp them, and who furthermore possess free will and so must choose their actions. That’s why ethics pertains to human beings, and not to stones, chipmunks or rhododendrons. At root, every ethic seeks to guide people toward an ideal or goal, usually the ideal of a “good life,” based on a conception of what is of value. The Objectivist ethics is based on the principle that the ultimate value is life itself, and that the standard by which we measure the good life is “man’s survival qua man,” as Ayn Rand put it.

What is the logical basis of this view? Rand did not begin, as many philosophers have done, with assumptions about what things are of value. She began with a question: Why do we need the concept of value in the first place? What does it refer to? What facts of reality give rise to the concept? In other words, she followed the method implied by the Objectivist epistemology as outlined in the previous chapter: she sought to place the concept in its hierarchical context by tracing its roots back to observations of reality. The implications of her analysis are spelled out in Diagram 2.1.

Rand described value as “**that which one acts to gain and/or keep**” (**Premise 1a** of Diagram 2.1).¹ This description identifies *values* with ends, purposes and goals; and identifies *valuing* with the pursuit of goals. We can understand this identification by observing the different types of *goal-directed actions* and contrasting them with other types of action. The goals of which we are directly aware are our conscious purposes. These are the easiest cases of valuing to recognize, and the first kind of values a child learns about. We know introspectively that our purposeful actions are aimed toward goals, because we envision or consider the goal before acting. Our conscious goals include such things as a meal, a job, a vacation, a checkup at the doctor’s, an education, a marriage, and so on. In valuing these things, we clearly seek to “gain and/or keep” them. In pursuing goals, we are directly aware of the ways in which we adapt our actions to achieve our purposes, as circumstances demand. And we are directly aware that our purposes aim at some benefit: they aim to achieve something we regard as good for us.²

Do we have to be aware of an action’s purpose introspectively to know if it is adapted toward attaining a goal? Of course not: we can also observe goal-directed action from the outside. Suppose your friend gives you a ride to the office. You can infer his goal from the way he acts: he switches lanes to pass

slow cars and changes his route to avoid a traffic jam. If his car breaks down, he hails a taxi. All his different specific actions (turn left, turn right, stop, hail cab, etc.) have the effect of achieving the goal of getting you both to the office.

We can observe similar adaptation toward a goal in the realm of human action beyond ourselves, and also in the actions of animals and plants. Animals act for goals without rational deliberation and choice, and plants act for goals without conscious sensations or desires at all. All of these things exhibit the basic pattern we pointed out above: their actions adapt to achieve goals, and the goals are sought for the sake of some benefit they confer. Some philosophers believe that there are no values beyond those chosen by conscious minds.³ But values exist wherever an entity initiates action for some goal. When a plant, after being moved, alters its growth so as to bend its leaves toward the sun, that goal-directed action is a form of valuing. When a squirrel gathers nuts to obtain the food it needs, that is likewise an instance of valuing. The similarities between these and human purposes are more essential than the differences.⁴

Now that we have surveyed the kinds of goal-directed action that the concept of value integrates, we must consider the essential characteristics of such actions. In her discussion of value in the essay “The Objectivist Ethics,” Rand noted that “the concept ‘value’ . . . presupposes an answer to the question: of value to *whom* and for *what*? It presupposes an entity capable of acting to achieve a goal in the face of an alternative.” We can put Rand’s point this way: for anything to be a value in the first place, it must fulfill two basic conditions that are implicit in the very concept of value:

- 1) There must be some one or some thing who values the thing in question, and obviously, that valuer must be capable of initiating goal-directed actions. It is an important insight of Rand’s that a value can exist only if *someone* or *something* “acts to gain and/or keep” it. This point is a crucial one to bear in mind as you proceed through ethics. It is traditional in philosophy and common in everyday usage to say that something would be “good,” “better,” “ideal,” and so forth, without specifying to whom it would be of value. Philosophers often speak of the “the Good” as if this were detached from the particular affairs of individual people. But in the Objectivist view, there is no “good” apart from the good of particular agents.⁵ In ethics it is always useful to check one’s premises, by asking of a proposed value: to whom is it of value?

- 2) The valuer must face an alternative in light of which the goal makes a difference. Here the relevant question to ask of a proposed value is: valuable for what? It is inherent in the phenomenon of valuing that the

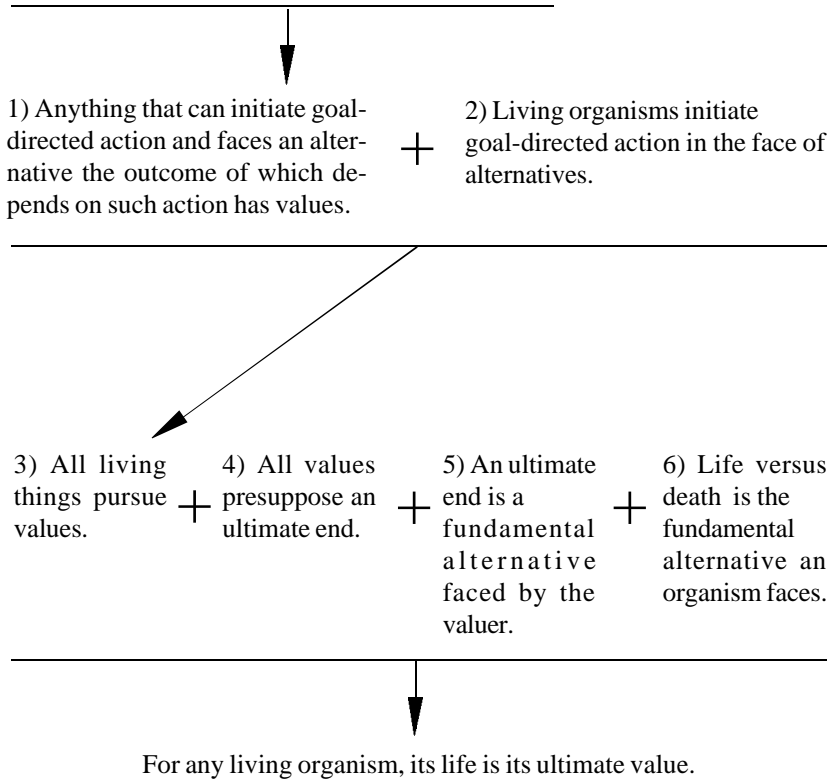
goal is sought because of some benefit it provides the valuer. Achieving the value or failing to achieve it must in some way affect the agent's fate: its existence, well-being, capacity for further action, or some other significant attribute. This presupposes that the agent faces an alternative of some kind, a set of possible outcomes that can in some way be ranked as better or worse for it.

Diagram 2.1: Life and Value

Inductive Evidence:

1, 2, 4, 5, 6: *Observation of living organisms, biology.*

1a) Value is that which one acts to gain and/or keep



These two implications about value are formulated together in **Premise 1** of the diagram: **anything that can initiate goal-directed action and faces an alternative the outcome of which depends on such action, has values.** They follow directly from Premise 1a.

Premises 1a and 1 state the connection between the concepts of purpose and of value. The next step is to recognize the connection between those concepts and the phenomenon of life. **Premise 2** asserts that **living organisms initiate goal-directed actions in the face of alternatives**, and thus fulfil the conditions for value that are identified in Premise 1. Living things by nature are goal-seekers who face alternatives. This point is supported inductively by examining living organisms. That is, we are drawing on the same observations as when we considered premises 1a and 1, but while in that case we were identifying a distinctive type of action, and the conditions presupposed by it, here we are identifying the types of entities that meet those conditions. The concepts of *value*, *goal-directed action*, and *life* pertain to the same referents, regarded from different points of view. *Valuing*, *goal-directed action*, and *the maintenance of life* refer to the same class of actions, on the part of the same category of entities.

The induction behind Premise 2 proceeds as follows: Based on the observation of living things, we can conclude that all living things share the following essential characteristics:

- ***Living organisms can initiate goal-directed action.***

This has two aspects:

- a. Living action is self-generated.

Living creatures act from a source within themselves. When a lion chases a gazelle, the gazelle is not pulling the lion, rather the lion is generating its own running motion. Notice that machines that act from stored energy (such as those with gasoline or electric motors) *seem* lifelike because they share this characteristic.

- b. Living action is goal-directed.

The biological sciences describe a vast realm of beings that act adaptively for goals. When its environment changes, and it confronts impediments, an organism changes its actions and often even its structure to adopt means of reaching some end. Only a few machines (heat-seeking missiles, for instance) are able to act adaptively to achieve a goal, and even then the goal is relatively simple—and it is a goal designed into the machine by humans, who are the real goal-seekers in such cases. By contrast, the adaptive responses the primitive amoeba uses to secure its food and avoid harm are far more sophisticated than those of any machine constructed to date. Goal-directed action is characteristic of living organisms as a class.

- ***Organisms continually face alternatives***

Living organisms are enormously complex and the actions they perform are enormously diverse—from the chemical actions of simple one-celled animals to the global ambitions of statesmen. Across this enormous range, however, such actions aim at benefits to the agents, who act in the face of alternative outcomes that are better or worse for them. A tree sends out roots in search of the water it needs; obtaining or failing to obtain water makes a difference to the tree, and that is why trees have acquired this capacity through evolution. Human beings, and other animals that possess consciousness, act from desire, and thus face the alternative of succeeding or failing to satisfy their desires.⁶

We can conclude that **all living things pursue values (Premise 3)**.⁷ But the conclusion of Diagram 1 says more than this. It specifies life itself as the ultimate value for any living thing. To arrive at this conclusion, we must engage in further induction from our observations of living things, induction that results in three other premises (4, 5, and 6) that emerge from our analysis of valuing.

If actions aim toward a goal, that goal is an end, and the actions are means to it. One goal, say playing tennis, may be a means to a greater goal, such as getting in shape. A tree's goal of obtaining water from the earth is a means of engaging in internal self-sustaining chemical processes that require water. Means and ends form chains in this way. Each chain must end somewhere. If one has a complex hierarchy of means and ends, then each of the means-end chains of which it is constructed must conclude in some ultimate end. An ultimate value is a value to which other values are means but is not itself a means to further ends. It is an end-in-itself. As Ayn Rand noted, "without an ultimate goal or end, there can be no lesser goals or means: a series of means going off into an infinite progression toward a nonexistent end is a metaphysical and epistemological impossibility."⁸ This is the point summarized in **Premise 4: All values presuppose an ultimate end.**

Since the end sought by a goal-directed action must make a difference to the valuer in light of some alternative it faces, **an ultimate end is a fundamental alternative faced by the valuer (Premise 5)**. For example, the tennis-player in the preceding paragraph faced the alternative of improving or failing to improve his physical condition. But is this an ultimate end? No, because his physical condition is not the fundamental alternative he faces; his condition matters because of its relationship to his health. And why does his health matter? Somewhere we must come to a fundamental alternative, one that underlies and explains the derivative ones. In a sequence of means and ends, a fundamental alternative is one that explains why other alternatives make a difference to the agent. The same is true for the tree that sends out roots in order to get water, which it needs in order to engage in internal chemical processes. In these and all other cases, according to Ayn Rand, we arrive eventually at a single fundamental alternative: **life versus death is the fundamental alternative an organism**

faces (Premise 6).

Organisms act to secure their continued existence, and if they fail to act, as Ayn Rand observed, they quickly die. Living things encounter many alternatives: while a flower blooms, it may be blown left or right, it may be warm or cold, it may attract bees, or not, and so on. But existence versus non-existence is the most *fundamental* alternative, because nonexistence precludes all other alternatives. When a flower wilts, dies, and is no more, then it is not blown around, it is not warm or cold, it is not there to attract bees. Of course, this isn't merely a fundamental alternative for living things: a structure of any sort may cease to exist. The structure of a sun can collapse; houses can burn down; windows sometimes shatter. However only living things act in response to this most basic of alternatives. "Life is a process of self-sustaining and self-generated action," Ayn Rand observed.⁹ The difference between a live organism and a dead one is not its shape or color, but the kinds of actions it takes. Living things not only *do* value, they *must* value, or cease to exist. That is why life is fundamental to an organism. It is the reason that life is metaphysically an end-in-itself: the essence of a living organism's nature is its capacity to initiate goal-directed actions, and in acting to preserve its life it acts to preserve that very capacity.

We have now established the premises we need to reach the **conclusion** of Diagram 2.1: **For any living organism, its life is its ultimate value.** This conclusion integrates two lines of arguments. The inductive evidence subsumed in premises 1 and 2 imply that all living things are valuers. The inductive evidence subsumed in premises 4, 5, and 6 tell us that their lives are their ultimate values.

One question that is sometimes raised about this derivation is whether there must be a *single* ultimate value to which all other values are means. Why couldn't a valuer's hierarchy of means and ends terminate in a range of ultimate values that are each ends-in-themselves, without a higher end to which they are all means? The basic answer is implicit in the premises we have already reviewed. If an organism had more than one ultimate end, what would it do when those ends conflicted? They might require contradictory actions, with no single higher end to determine which action should be taken at a given time. The alternative to having an ultimate end is chaotic action and indecision.

The most basic living things act in ways that are determined by their natures: they act, and respond, but do not choose their actions. In this way, they are like sophisticated computer programs. But like a program, if their actions become inconsistent they malfunction, break down, and fail to act. If a computer program has a bug, it produces inaccurate data; in the worst case, it "crashes." In a living being, an example of such a "bug" would be a cancerous tumor. A tumor grows out of control, destroying the body. It is an organ of the body acting without regard to the fundamental alternative. When an organism

develops such a “bug,” it tends to die. So the actions of healthy organisms are aimed at a single ultimate and fundamental value of life.¹⁰

We human beings have to hold our ultimate value by choice.¹¹ Unlike simpler organisms, we can choose values that are against or unrelated to the value of life. This is precisely why we need to hold our ultimate value explicitly. Our ability to choose doesn’t make holding inconsistent values any more effective for us than for a bacterium. If one were to choose not to hold any ultimate value, some of one’s values would be means to competing ends, and the result would be indeterminacy, indecision, and contradiction. We *can* act for contradictory ends, and that is what most historical theories of ethics have implicitly counseled us to do, but if we do so we will experience frustration, incoherence, suffering, and even death. If we want our actions to be consistent and coherent, and therefore efficacious, we must organize our value hierarchy on the basis of an ultimate value or end-in-itself.

Because human beings need to identify their values by deliberate thinking, and pursue those values by choice, their actions do not always aim at goals that in fact support life. It is possible to value things that are not actually valuable by the standard of life. Of course, if someone chooses not to live in the first place, he ceases to be a valuer at all. Short of death, however, it is possible for us to make a mistake about what to value, either because we have embraced the wrong moral code or because we have failed to apply a correct code properly to the particulars of a situation. In addition, through evasion, we can ignore the long-term in favor of short-term goals, ignore our commitments in order to pursue other desires, and so on. Some Objectivists taken this to mean that we need two concepts of value: In this scheme, Rand’s basic concept of “that which one seeks to gain and/or keep” is the concept of the *valued*, and acting to obtain it is *valuing*; whereas the standard of life gives us the concept of what is objectively *valuable*.

We believe this approach is not compatible with the derivation of the conclusion that life is the ultimate value. That derivation is based on the convergence of the concepts of goal-directed action, value, and life, which designate the same phenomenon in reality. The phenomenon is a complex one, and for technical purposes we can distinguish its different aspects. In particular we can distinguish the capacity to initiate goal-directed action from the fundamental alternatives that give such action its point. In economics, for example, it is valid to abstract the human pursuit of ends from the question of whether those ends actually serve life in accordance with true moral principles. In medicine, conversely, it is valid to study the conditions that actually promote life in abstraction from the patient’s willingness to pursue those conditions. In philosophy, however, we must recognize that each element exists only in the context of the other. Means and ends go together.

On the one hand, we cannot speak of what is valuable except in refer-

ence to an agent capable of initiating action to obtain it. We can abstract from the particular nature, capacities, and choices of such an agent, but we cannot abstract altogether from the need for some agent. We cannot ignore the question, valuable to whom?

On the other hand, we cannot speak of valuing except for an agent who acts in the face of an alternative. If there were agents capable of initiating action but for which nothing was better or worse (as in Rand's hypothetical example of the immortal robot), we would not need to distinguish their actions as a fundamentally different category from mechanical, non-goal-directed actions. Human beings in particular, as living beings, do face the alternative of life or death; their capacities for pursuing goals, including the conscious capacities for thinking, desiring, planning, etc., evolved to support the satisfaction of their needs as living beings. When a person makes an error and values something that does not in fact serve his life, it is normally an error, nothing more. The person still seeks to promote his life—that is still the fundamental alternative that makes his action purposive in the first place. For example, a person who gets food poisoning from a spoiled piece of meat was obviously not deliberately trying to get sick.

As we proceed through this book, we will examine many other values that are required by life. These values are not as obviously connected with life as physical health is; that is why man needs a moral code to identify them. People may fail to achieve such values either because they do not know to seek them in the first place, or because they adopt mistaken means of achieving them. For example, someone might mistakenly seek approval from others as a source of self-esteem. In such a case, achieving or failing to achieve self-esteem is the immediate alternative that makes the pursuit of approval an instance of valuing, and that makes approval itself a value for that person. It is not just that approval is something the person seeks to gain; his motivation for seeking it traces back to the basic alternative of life or death, which is the objective standard of value. As a point of fact, there is simply no way to construct a coherent range of ends that excludes life.

As an interesting reflection of this fact, consider the kinds of values that philosophers and theologians have advocated as bases of major ethical systems. Historically, the major candidates for the ultimate human value have tended to depend on the idea of life, albeit in a distorted form. For example, many religions, including Judaism, Christianity and Islam, extol sacrifice and duty in the real world, but hold eternal life in the hereafter as the ultimate end in ethics. While they seem to deny that life is the goal, in fact they depend on it: the afterlife that they envision in paradise is just life in an imaginary, false metaphysical context.

The great Indian religions have put up more of struggle against life as the ultimate value in ethics. Hinduism avoids addressing the fundamental alternative by presuming that death is not actually possible and that we are endlessly

reborn into new lives. Hinduism thus takes the context of life for granted, and defines its highest ends as improved kinds of life: life as a wise priest, for instance, rather than as a dung beetle. Buddhism is the religion that flirts most explicitly with true self-abnegation. Derived from the Hindu world-view of endless reincarnation, Buddhism in its original form regards escape from the illusions of the apparent world and the self as the proper end of human action. But the forms of Buddhism most commonly practiced usually offer the promise of union with Buddha or afterlife in a supernatural paradise as the reward of virtue, allowing the ultimate value of life to creep in through the back door, as it were.

Non-religious ethics also trade implicitly on the nature of life as the one, true end-in-itself. The currently fashionable theory known as “sociobiology,” for example, holds that our proper values derive from life, but not from one’s own life. Instead sociobiologists hold that, thanks to evolution, we achieve satisfaction by acting in ways that propagate our genes. The problem with this view, put briefly, is that it fails to recognize the importance of reason and choice in human life. Sociobiology as an ethic confuses the means by which life comes about with life itself. Our evolutionary heritage is part of the context in which we pursue our lives, but it is one’s life itself which is a unitary, ongoing, self-supporting process.

Many non-religious ethics consider the good to consist in fulfilling one’s duty to ends outside of oneself. Usually, duty still serves a kind of life, but one divorced from the individual. Collectivists such as statist, nationalists or tribalists hold the “life” of the state, nation or tribe as their ultimate end. Duty ethics are impractical to the extent that they demand that people act against their own lives, so it is no accident that such philosophies have led to terrible bloodshed in wars and revolutions. Their most ardent followers literally tend to die out.¹² Collectivists must either act inconsistently by valuing their lives over the collective, or must sacrifice their lives in war or service. In fact most advocates of such philosophies as nationalism use the collective, hypocritically, as a means to advance their own lives.

Immanuel Kant is the odd man out among ethical thinkers: he thought duty was an end-in-itself, without reference to any other life, benefit or reward of any kind. But while life is actually its own reward, duty is not. By separating virtue from the possibility of benefit or gain, Kant’s ethical system does not pose an alternative to life as the ultimate value; it attempts to erase the connection between virtue and values. It is this radical separation of the idea of a value or goal from its actual basis in fact, that makes Kant’s approach the antithesis of the Objectivist one.

We can see from this brief survey of religion and moral philosophy that the Objectivist analysis of life as the basis of value brings out a truth that has implicitly influenced conceptions of value throughout history, despite their

explicit differences with Objectivism. This truth is that life is the metaphysical end-in-itself to which other values are means.

We can also see from Rand's analysis of value that the pursuit of this end-in-itself includes different aspects or dimensions that we will refer back to in explaining the logical structure of the Objectivist ethics. 1) A valuer initiates action, exercising whatever capacities it has for pursuing goals. So we can compare and contrast valuers along the dimension of what capacities they possess, the different types of action they can initiate. 2) A valuer acts for a goal that would be of some benefit, so a second dimension of comparison is the nature of the goal, the specific kind of value it represents. 3) Finally, there is the beneficiary of goal-directed action, the person or thing for whom the benefit is sought. If life is the ultimate value, the organism is ultimately acting to benefit itself. But in doing so, it may seek specific benefits for others as well, as when animals feed their young.

These are the three basic dimensions to be found in all goal-directed action, and we can use them to differentiate the different types of action that living organisms engage in. Human beings are distinctive in two ways that apply to each of the dimensions. First, human beings possess free will, so we must pursue life as an ultimate value by choice. It is possible for a human being, unlike the members of other species, to choose not to initiate action, and specifically not to initiate the act of thought; as we have seen, man's volition is fundamentally his power to choose whether to think or not. Human beings can choose not to seek ends that are objectively valuable by the standard of life; they can even choose to end their lives through suicide. Finally, humans can choose not to benefit themselves but to subordinate their own good to that of others—family, tribe, the nation, the environment. This is indeed what most other codes of morality demand. Secondly, our mode of cognition is conceptual, which means we need to identify by rational thought the proper actions to initiate, ends to seek, and beneficiaries to act for. This is why humans, unlike other species, need morality as a body of principles in order to live successfully. On the foundation laid in this section, with life as the ultimate value, we can go on to develop the Objectivist morality.

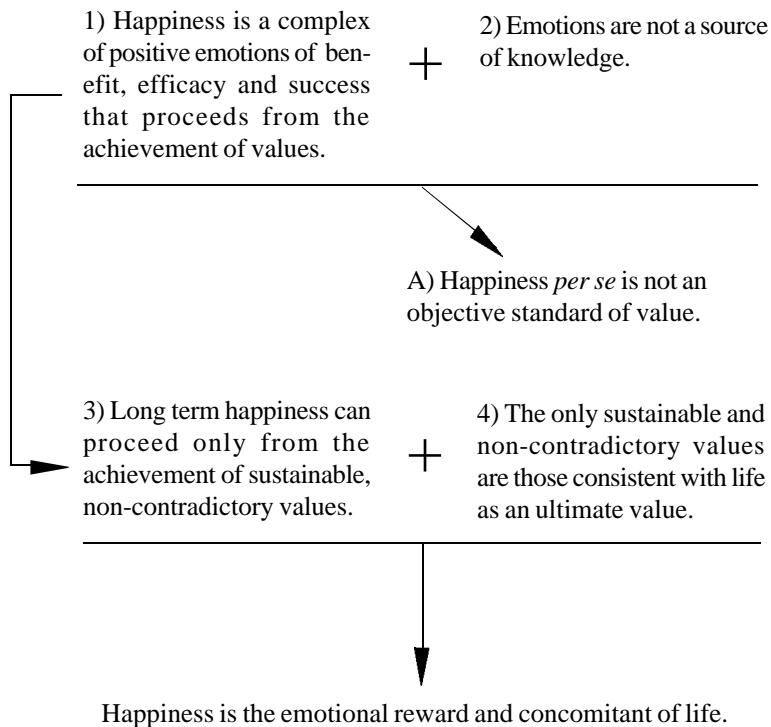
Life and Happiness

The most plausible alternative to life as the ultimate value is that offered by Utilitarians, Epicureans and others who believe that happiness should be one's final goal. Happiness is one's emotional experience of success, benefit, efficacy, and well-being, and because it is felt directly, it seems self-evidently good. Objectivism holds that pursuing one's happiness, properly understood, is the same as pursuing one's life: it not only *feels* good, it *is* good. This is why, as the book progresses, we will often speak of the end in ethics as "life

and happiness.” However, since happiness is an emotional state—and a complex one—it is a derivative phenomenon, not the starting place for ethics. Diagram 2.2 analyzes the profound connection between happiness and the ultimate value of life.

Premise 1 states that **Happiness is a complex of positive emotions of benefit, efficacy and success that proceeds from the achievement of valued goals.** Happiness is not a single emotion, but a complex admixture of positive feelings such as joy, confidence, excitement, affection, accomplishment, and pleasure. It includes the overall sense that life is going well, that one has achieved and is able to enjoy the important values in one’s life. Of course, one can be happy even in trying circumstances: simply being engaged with and successfully struggling with one’s difficulties results in a profound sense of well-being and satisfaction, and one’s exultation in success may be even more keen in such circumstances than it would if one were more secure. Happiness is at least as much a function of internal values, such as pride and the possession of a good

Diagram 2.2: Happiness and Life



character, as of external values such as wealth. Nevertheless, a person who has lost the values that are important to him, or failed to obtain them in the first place, will not be happy. The emotions that proceed from failure, loss, and deprivation are negative ones, including pain, frustration, anger, disgust, and so on.

Since happiness results from the achievement of values, the Objectivist ethics considers happiness a legitimate description of our ultimate end: it is the internal experience of meeting the requirements of life. But it cannot serve as a standard for identifying those requirements. Rand described the distinction between purpose and standard 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...

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.¹³

The significance of this distinction is that a standard is a principle; it is a form of cognition; it is based on our knowledge of what will and will not be of benefit, and of what is and is not a fruitful means of achieving it. Happiness, however, is an emotion, and as such is not a form of cognition.

This reasoning is analyzed in the first line of Diagram 2.1. In addition to the definition of happiness as expressed in Premise 1, we rely on **Premise 2, emotions are not a source of knowledge**, which we established in Chapter 1. Emotions are not forms of cognition, but result from subconscious integrations of judgments of what is valuable. Emotion gives a direct, affective experience of what benefit and loss are, of what is good and what is bad. Emotions provide us with psychological motivation. But human emotion is the product of a volitional process, and as we’ve seen, it can give false indications of value, if it is based on mistaken judgments in the past. This point is **conclusion A** in the diagram: **happiness *per se* is not an objective standard of value**. As premises 1 and 2 together indicate, we can’t simply assume, because we feel happy doing something, that it is the right thing to do. At least in the short term, feelings of happiness may depend as much on what our goals are, as on the moral status of those goals. Genghis Khan, for example, is reported to have declared that there was no greater joy than slaying one’s male enemy, stealing his goods, raping his women, and enslaving his children; given his hierarchy of values, maybe it did give him a kind of fierce joy.¹⁴

The second step in the diagram provides a fuller explanation of why there can be a divergence between short-term pleasures and long-term happi-

ness. It also sheds further light on the relationship between happiness and life as ultimate ends. Given our understanding of happiness, as expressed in premise 1, it follows that **happiness over the long term can only proceed from the achievement of sustainable, non-contradictory goals (Premise 3)**. If acting to achieve one's goals cannot be sustained, then the feelings that come from success in that action cannot be sustained, either. And if one's goals are fundamentally contradictory, success in one naturally brings both joy and sorrow, since it entails failure in another. As a lasting, pervasive state of mind, happiness can only proceed from the successful pursuit of values over the long term. Ayn Rand called happiness "a state of non-contradictory joy — a joy without penalty or guilt, a joy that does not clash with any of your values and does not work for your destruction...."¹⁵ One can feel emotions of joy or satisfaction, to a certain extent, from achieving any goal upon which one sets one's mind—that's why conclusion A is true. But it is only success in attaining a harmonious, self-sustaining set of values that can lead to happiness in the long term.

The next step in our reasoning is the recognition that **the only sustainable and non-contradictory values are those consistent with life as an ultimate value (Premise 4)**. The basic evidence for this assertion comes from the analysis of value at the beginning of this chapter, which established that life is the ultimate value. We noted there that values form hierarchies of means and ends, and that a hierarchy presupposes an ultimate end. Without a unitary ultimate end, values lower down in the hierarchy can be in conflict. At a minimum, they make competing demands on our time and other resources—we cannot simultaneously watch a movie and study for an exam—and we need to make such choices by appealing to a higher-level purpose. And sometimes potential values conflict in more direct ways. A sumptuous dessert every night for dinner is not (for most people) compatible with a lean figure. Once again, we must appeal to a higher-level purpose in order to pursue a consistent set of values. For the reasons given in section 1 of this chapter, life itself is the only thing that can serve as an ultimate value, because only through pursuing it do we confront our most fundamental alternative.

As we proceed through the book, we will see that our needs as human beings are complex, as are the capacities—especially the faculty of reason—that we have available for meeting those needs. Avoiding conflict and confusion as we pursue our values over the span of a lifetime, coordinating our actions across a wide array of concrete situations, is a challenge even with a firm commitment to one's life as an ultimate value and standard for selecting derivative values. The rest of this book, then, will provide further support for and illustration of Premise 4.

Ayn Rand said that **happiness is the emotional "reward and concomitant" of life**, which is the final conclusion we draw from the diagram.¹⁶ Happiness is best described as the affective experience of success in living. It is

what one feels, psychologically, when one is living well.¹⁷ That is the sense in which it is the concomitant of life. (This does not mean, however, that happiness occurs as an automatic result of achieving the values that life requires. If we want the full benefit of our emotions, we have to attend to them and the integrations that produce them, so that our feelings of good and bad coincide with our knowledge of good and bad. It is a fact of human psychology that if we have to fight our emotions or distance ourselves from them, we become less alert to opportunities and less engaged with our values. This is why Rand made the harmony of reason and emotion such an important theme in her novels.)¹⁸ Happiness is the “reward” of life in that moments of great happiness are the times when one feels most profoundly the success and achievement of which life is made up, and by which life is sustained.

The philosophies that take happiness as an ethical standard all trade, implicitly, on the close link between happiness and life over the long term. It is the fact that a consistent happiness proceeds from pursuing life that makes it possible for happiness to seem to be self-sufficient. The Objectivist analysis of happiness recognizes this link explicitly, and therefore does not accept happiness as the basis of ethics, but rather as the way one experiences, emotionally, the ultimate value of life. Happiness *feels* good, because it tends to follow from values that *are* good.

The Basic Logical Structure of the Objectivist Ethics

Now that we have established the principle of life as the ultimate value, we can apply it to man as a specific type of organism. With the principle in hand, it is a matter of causal demonstration to establish the content of ethics and politics. Our procedure is to demonstrate which things are causally conducive to survival: that which produces, furthers, and the protects the life of a human being is right, good, and valuable —to that human being. And we must show which things are causally detrimental to the life of a human being: that which destroys, diminishes, or threatens a human life is wrong, bad, disvaluable.

As Ayn Rand put it:

Life or death is man’s only fundamental alternative. To live is his basic act of choice. If he chooses to live, a rational ethics will tell him what principles of action are required to implement his choice. If he does not choose to live, nature will take its course.

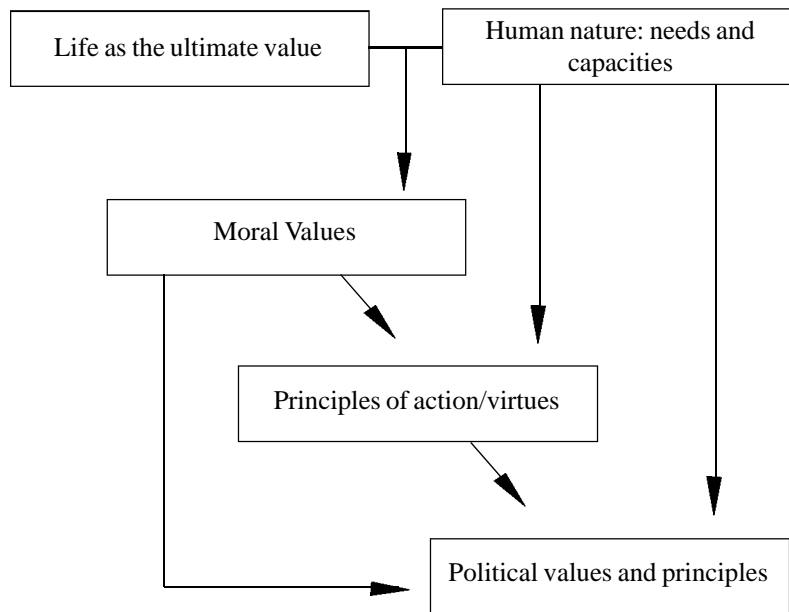
Reality confronts man with a great many “musts,” but all of these are conditional; the formula of realistic necessity is: “You must, if —“ and the “if” stands for man’s choice: “—if you want to achieve a certain goal.” You must eat, if you want to survive. You must work, if you want to eat. You must think, if you want to work. You must look at

reality, if you want to think – if you want to know what to do – if you want to know what goals to choose – if you want to know how to achieve them.¹⁹

The result of the method of causal demonstration is the basic logical structure of the Objectivist ethics, which is outlined in Diagram 2.3. Before we address a particular issue, such as the virtue of rationality or the theory of rights, we must first construct the preceding steps. Beginning with the ultimate value of life, and the particular needs of human life, we can determine which values are proper to us. In light of those values, and taking account of our capacities, we can infer what actions we should take, that is, what the virtues are. We can then derive our political values and principles by combining our knowledge of the virtues with what we've established about values and the foundations of ethics. We won't finish covering this ground until the last chapter, but Diagram 2.3 gives you a road map of the route we'll be taking.

Diagram 2.3: The Basic Logical Structure of Ethics

Induction occurs at every stage.



Our task for this section is to understand better what it means to draw an arrow from the top of Diagram 2.3 to one of the lower boxes. That is, what does this method of causal demonstration amount to?

To make causal demonstrations in Ethics we have to look to a vast variety of evidence from the world around us. In this book, we can only indicate what this evidence would be, and point to where it may be sought. Evidence of some sort can be found in everything that is related to or has some impact on human life, so most of human knowledge can be relevant to our reasoning. One way to begin to get a handle on such a vast body of evidence is to sort it into relevant categories. We can identify three broad (and still enormous) areas of evidence: 1) the physical world or nature, 2) society, and 3) the nature of man. These match well with established areas of scientific investigation.

1) *Evidence from Nature*. Ethics must take into account the natural world and the opportunities it offers for human action. This means that new scientific discoveries, which expand our knowledge of the world, have implications for our ethical conclusions. Ayn Rand remarked, for instance, that it would have been difficult to fully understand the role of reason in material production before modern science and the onset of the Industrial Revolution.

2) *Evidence from Society*. The nature of society and social interaction is another important causal factor in considering the ethics. Just as we must base our actions on what is physically possible, so we must take into account what society can or may do. The evidence of the social sciences will have implications for our positions. For example, our understanding of the values to be gained from living by voluntary trade depends on the theory of the division of labor and the facts about trade that economists have studied. Without this evidence we might conclude, as the ancients did, that the sacrifice of one to another is unavoidable.

3) *Evidence from Human Nature*. Most crucially, we must consider the needs and capacities of human beings. In other words, we must base our understanding of what is good for man on our knowledge of human nature. Medicine, psychology and other fields that study man offer important evidence. Our understanding of moral character, for instance, which underlies the virtues of integrity and justice, depends on psychological facts. Epistemological insights on the powers and limitations of consciousness will also strongly affect our conclusions.

Context and Ethics

In saying that science is an important source of evidence for ethics, we are not saying that morality wavers from day-to-day depending on the latest issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine*. In this text we are considering morality at the most general level, and at this level it is based on facts that by

and large are accessible to everyone. New evidence about the effect of saturated fat on heart disease may mean that you should change your diet, but it won't change the fact that you need food and must produce it or trade for it. However, technological changes do sometimes affect areas of life long thought immutable, and we must look out for these at times. For instance, the Objectivist treatment of sex distinguishes its role in reproduction from its value as a source of psychological visibility. Before this century's advances in reliable birth control technology, it would have been extremely difficult to pursue the latter value independently of the choice to have children. So this particular scientific advance changed the presuppositions that underlie ethical principles concerning, among other things, marriage and chastity.

The principles of the Objectivist ethics are supported inductively in the context of normal life. Their primary purpose is to address situations that are likely to affect our lives, situations such as finding a job and pursuing a career in the workplace, forming friendships and love relationships, raising a family, and participating in organizations, to name only a few. These principles address all the situations one would normally expect to encounter. Unlike a random list of moral do's and don'ts, they form a comprehensive ethic, a moral code for all of life, and for a full life. Nevertheless, certain real but very unusual situations fall outside the scope of these principles. There were real people on the Titanic, for example, facing the decision of how to allot the limited number of lifeboats. Many people regard such emergencies as test cases for ethics, and to teach or disseminate the Objectivist ethics, one must be prepared to discuss them. But one should do so with a clear understanding of the ways in which they are and are not relevant to ethics.

In the broadest sense, the Objectivist ethics always provides a modicum of guidance, even in extreme circumstances. Regardless of context, one's life is one's ultimate value. As long as one chooses to live, one should always try to act in a practical manner to secure one's own life and values. Because such emergencies normally pose direct and severe threats to survival, the best advice is to get out of the situation and restore normal conditions as quickly as possible.²⁰ Those who invoke emergencies in ethical discussions, however, are rarely concerned with practical issues of how to deal with real emergencies when they occur. Their concern is normally to conduct thought experiments that will test the validity of moral principles. In this respect, the primary significance of these situations is methodological—and that is the reason we raise them here.

The first point to appreciate is that emergencies by nature are rare events, and they are discontinuous with the normal context in which we live. It's usually obvious, and strikingly unusual, to find oneself in a situation where one's life is pitted against that of another, for instance. Because emergencies are dissimilar to the normal environment, the normal principles do not apply. This does not

invalidate those principles. As products of cognitive integration, according to the Objectivist epistemology, they are based upon and incorporate into their content the evidence on which they are based, which in this case is the observation of and induction from the similarities in normal life. It violates the contextual theory of knowledge to treat these principles as floating absolutes, detached from the cognitive context in which they are established.

Secondly, the principles we are going to discuss form a hierarchy among themselves, with some derived first and others later. In particular, principles for how we should deal with each other depend on more fundamental principles about our basic relationship to reality as individuals and about how we should meet our own basic needs. Most cases of emergencies, like that of the lifeboat, tend to raise questions about inter-personal or social morality. A purely existential emergency, such as being trapped alone in an avalanche, seems morally uninteresting: as long as other people aren't involved, *of course* one should do whatever one can to survive! It is the equation of morality with social morality, the equation of what one *should* do with how one *should treat others*, that gives lifeboat-style emergencies such prominence in the broader culture. But social morality, for Objectivism, is derivative; the relevant principles come later in the hierarchy and cannot be considered in isolation from the more fundamental principles. In one way or another, for example, emergencies are situations in which the interests of different people seem to conflict, and this is often taken as a refutation of the Objectivist principle that the interests of rational men do not conflict. But that principle is based on the more basic principle that it is in our interest as humans to live independently, by reason and production. This principle applies to normal situations in which production and independent action are possible, as they are generally not in emergencies. If this underlying principle does not apply in this context, then we cannot assume that the derivative conflict-of-interest principle applies, either. Treating emergencies as a test case for that principle tears that principle out of its context in the hierarchy of the ethics.

There is another kind of social “emergency” situation that is quite common. This is the kind of situation that proceeds from dealing with people who act irrationally, and especially violently. Since people have free will, it is a part of the normal context to expect that one may need to defend oneself against others, or that one's country may, through no irrational aggression on the part of its citizens or government, become involved in a war. Then, too, one may find in one's normal life that because one's government does not respect rights, few people are able to get by as independent producers and traders; this is what normal life was like in the former Soviet Union, for instance. All these are cases of values being threatened by the immoral use of force, either at the personal level, in the case of a mugger, or at the political level, in the case of an unsought war or unjust regime. We will discuss the means of controlling such threats at

the social level when we discuss politics and government in chapter 7. As we discuss social ethics, especially in chapter 6, we will address the question of whether coercion can be a reliable means to gain values more generally.

Therefore, the context of our discussion of ethics has to be the basic circumstances of life that one can reasonably expect to encounter. Largely, these raise issues of human nature and physical possibility. Is it possible to live by production and trade? Is it possible to live by reason? Because politics is a derivative branch of ethics, we cannot take the given political circumstances of any country as something basic: unlike human nature, a political situation can be changed. Thus our ethical reasoning will depend on showing that our code of morality can be widely applied in human life, that lifeboat emergencies are rare, and that coercion on both the personal and political levels is not a reliable means of supporting one's life.

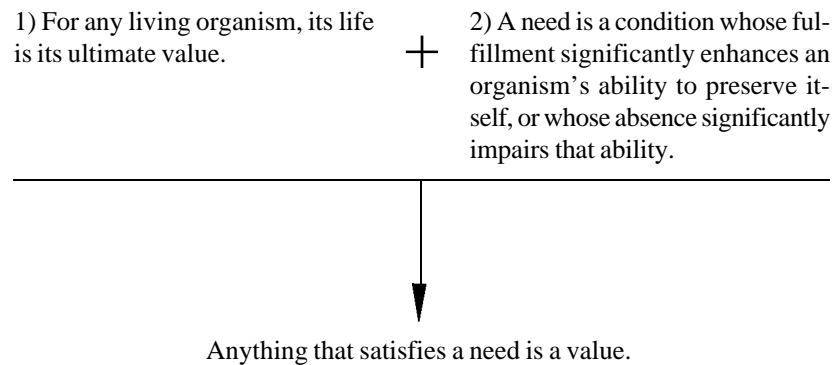
As you think about the moral arguments in this book, you should consider situations that you expect to encounter in life, and judge how well each argument addresses them, bearing in mind the foregoing caveats regarding political circumstances. It hardly needs saying that imaginary situations that are unreal, impractical, and irrelevant are certainly not worthy of consideration. Only situations that could occur in real life are worth looking into, despite the admiration that so many scholars of philosophy have for zany "hypothetical" situations.

So we will proceed through the ethics as an exercise in causal demonstration in the context of normal life. With life as our ultimate value, our understanding of *human nature* will allow us to determine what man's proper *moral values* are. Knowing these, we can determine what principles of action are appropriate for obtaining those values. In other words, from our values we can discover the *virtues*. With our ethical principles in hand, we can then determine the proper principles for evaluating social institutions.

Needs

Needs are the conditions that must be fulfilled in order to produce, further, or protect an individual's life. The role of needs in the ethics is analyzed in Diagram 2.4. Its **Premise 1** reiterates the conclusion of Diagram 2.1: **For any living organism, its life is its ultimate value. Premise 2** defines "need:" **A need is a condition whose presence significantly enhances an organism's ability to preserve itself, or whose absence significantly impairs that ability.** Premise 2 is an inductive generalization, one that is implicit in the practice of biologists, and for which the evidence is the nature of living organisms. The place of biological needs in the logical structure of Objectivism is this: since one's life is one's ultimate value, one has to know what one *needs* for the maintenance of life in order to know what to seek as a value.

Diagram 2.4: Needs and Values



The needs of a living organism determine its goals. In other words, its needs determine its values. This is the **conclusion** of Diagram 2.4: **anything that satisfies a need is a value**. Of course, when we speak colloquially of a need, we mean merely that something is necessary in order to do or get something. If one wants to unscrew a water pipe, one needs a pipe-wrench, for example. And indeed, given one's goal in this case, a pipe wrench is a value. Here, however, we are concerned with the most fundamental kind of needs: biological needs. A biological need is also necessary for something, but that "something" is life itself. Oxygen is such a necessity: we cannot survive without it for more than a few minutes.

Something that fulfills a need does not necessarily have to affect the individual's life immediately or catastrophically. If a person fails to get vitamin C, for instance, he does not feel any immediate effect. But as days go by he will become weaker. His gums may bleed and his teeth fall out as he suffers from scurvy. Eventually, the lack of vitamin C can kill him. Similarly, the loss of a friend rarely kills someone, but it narrows one's circle of intercourse and deprives one of aid and comfort in difficult times, cuts off a habitual fellowship and interdependence, among other effects. All of these consequences tend to make life harder than it otherwise would be.

There is an altruistic ethical doctrine, made famous by the Marxist dictum "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need," which holds that needs are ethically primary. That is, the mere fact that one person has a need implies a moral claim on other people. But in Objectivism, it is one's individual life that is primary. One's needs fit into the logical structure of ethics as aspects of furthering one's life. The needs of others have a different

moral significance. Just as one's own needs are directly significant only to oneself, so the needs of others are directly significant only to them. To understand how the needs of others are relevant to one's *own* life is a somewhat complex matter, one that depends on the analysis of friendship and love in terms of a need for visibility, communication, and economic exchange that we will be developing in future chapters.

Capacities

It would be absurd to determine how one *should* act before figuring out how one *can* act. So at each step in the logical structure of ethics we must inductively relate the kinds of things people need to the kinds of things they are able to do.

Biologists call the abilities of a goal-directed being its *capacities*. Capacities are potentials for action. For instance, our thumbs allow us to handle objects, a capacity which dolphins, having only fins, do not share; but then, they can hold their breath for extended periods and can swim like the devil.

Our capacities determine the kinds of actions we must take to obtain values. Because man is not endowed with a warm fur coat, but is endowed with a reasoning mind and dexterous fingers, if he is to survive in cold climes he must craft warm clothing against the weather. In a moral context, it is our capacities, in relation to the values they help us acquire, that determine what patterns of action are virtues.

Like values, needs and capacities only exist in relation to some particular organism. "Man" as such, does not have needs, because in reality there are only individual people, each different from the other. When we speak of "the needs and capacities of man," we are making an inductive generalization about the members of our species. Similarly, when Ayn Rand spoke of the "standard" of ethics as "Man's survival-qua-man" she was speaking abstractly of the needs and capacities that we all share.²¹ Of course, individual members of a biological species are not identical: they are not literally the same. For example, person A may need an intense relationship with one other person in order to achieve visibility; person B may need a range of varied relationships with diverse people. What is common is the need for visibility in some form, and that is the level of abstraction at which we speak of visibility as a moral value. The same pattern applies to capacities. Two people may differ in the nature and degree of productive achievement of which they are capable, but all normal people are capable of producing in some form, to some degree, and this is the level of abstraction at which we speak of productiveness as a moral virtue. It is logically precise, then, to say that man has such needs, and in as much as we all possess needs and capacities within the relevant range, it is accurate to speak of *our* needs and capacities.

Morality is a code of principles to guide human action: it is universal. Its principles can only be true when the facts of each of our individual lives actually provide evidence for them. And the principles must address a relevant level of generality. It is proper to say that man needs food, but wrong to say that, because you find chili peppers tasty, we should all enjoy them, despite our great differences in palate and preference.

With the analysis of needs and capacities in hand, we have a pattern of reasoning in ethics that goes as follows:

- X is something we need: X is value
- Y is an action²² that will achieve a value: Y is virtue.

There is a strict order of fundamentality here: values come first, and virtues are determined by their service in achieving values. Virtue is a means to obtaining values. Therefore, when we judge a course of action, we do so by looking for the effect it has. An action can be virtuous if, and only if, it tends to have the consequence of fulfilling a need.

A virtue must help one obtain or protect some value. But the fact that an act obtains one particular value does not necessarily mean it is a virtue. Money is a value, for example, and one can sometimes get some money by stealing. But stealing does not merely get one money; it has many harmful effects, not least of which is that a thief stands in danger of arrest or of falling in with violent, untrustworthy compatriots. An act can only be virtuous if its overall tendency is to promote one's life. But, if it is to do so, it must serve in net to gain or defend values.²³ The end does justify the means, but only if we take into account the entire hierarchy of our ends, with life itself as the ultimate end.

Flourishing and Survival

Because the Objectivist approach to ethics is revolutionary, it tends to attract some relatively technical criticism, both sympathetic and hostile. One area of confusion that an advocate of Objectivism is likely to encounter and wonder about is whether survival really can provide the basis for a full, rich ethic. Isn't it, as some critics claim, too narrow and confining? The rest of this book is, in part, an answer to that question. But at this point it is worth more closely examining the logical relationship between survival and a "truly human" life.

The concept of a truly human life at issue here is usually based on an ethics on *self-realization*. In this view, the truly human life is one that realizes one's potentialities or capacities: capacities for learning, working, playing, loving, and so on. But since self-realization boils down to the development and

exercise of our capacities, it can never be a fundamental value. Of course it is true there are pleasures to be had from the use of capacities. For instance, much of what we enjoy in playing sports or games is using or challenging our abilities. Often, this pleasure arises because we are making ourselves healthier and stronger, physically or mentally. When we extend a skill, discover depths of endurance we didn't know we had, or overcome a difficult mental challenge, it is usually true that we are exercising capacities that do fulfill our life needs. And of course, it is psychologically satisfying. But at best these values are derivative. A runner may derive useful aerobic conditioning and psychological pleasure from his exercise, but if he has a weak heart or pushes himself beyond his proper limits, he may harm himself. He can't tell, from the mere fact that he is running, whether he is doing himself any good.

In general, exercising a capacity can only be valuable with reference to a need that it serves. And needs are defined by *survival* value. After all, we have capacities for hate, war, laziness, and other harmful activities: on a pure ethic of self-realization, shouldn't one embrace these potentialities as well? The only way to tell is by reference to a more fundamental standard. Although Ayn Rand made it clear that she meant her morality to ensure a rich, fully human life, it is the bare fundamental alternative of survival versus death that stands at the root of all values.

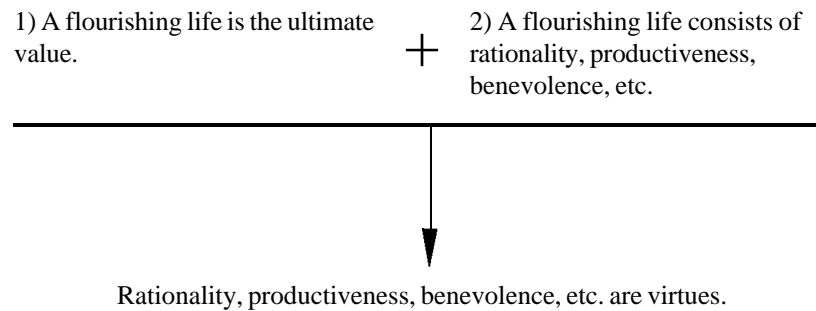
Several admirers of Rand's approach to ethics have debated the sense in which survival can serve the most basic criterion of ethics. Here we have argued that survival is the literal alternative of life versus death, existence versus nonexistence. Others, however, argue that this stark alternative is too restricted a foundation for ethics.²⁴ Instead, they argue that morality should be based on the idea of a good or proper life, also known as a *flourishing* life. Advocates of life-as-flourishing include the potentialities or capacities of man in their idea of human life. For them, a person only truly lives when he is prudent, productive, benevolent, courageous, and so forth. Notice that if a flourishing life were the ultimate value in ethics, we wouldn't have to prove that rationality is a virtue: rationality would be included in our *most basic* idea of the good for man. All of ethics could fit into a diagram that shows one straightforward deduction. Diagram 4 presents such an inference.

Premise 1 states the assumption that **a flourishing life is the ultimate value. Premise 2** adds the rich content assumed in the "flourishing" conception of life: **a flourishing life consists of rationality, productiveness, benevolence, etc.** The **conclusion** summarizes ethics in one fell swoop: **rationality, productiveness, benevolence, etc., are virtues.**

The argument in Diagram 4 would save us a great deal of trouble in explaining the Objectivist ethics, if it were adequate. But it is not adequate, and thus does not form part of the logical structure of Objectivism.

The essential reason for this inadequacy is that, like the ethics of self-

Diagram 2.5: An Illustration of Ethics as if Based on Flourishing



realization it resembles, the content of the Flourishing standard is *arbitrary*. After all, what gets included in the expanded idea of “human life?” Without an established procedure for determining what the good life is, it is hard to tell how one would exclude any kind of commonly observed behavior from “the good life.” For instance, a communitarian may think that man is by nature a political animal. He argues that man needs to be enmeshed in tradition and social rules, and that individual rights are therefore *contrary* to flourishing. How can a classical liberal advocate of life-as-flourishing objectively gainsay that? The communitarian and the classical liberal would end up arguing over the meaning of flourishing, over the *standard* of their supposedly shared ethics. Without a clear, fundamental criterion for determining what is and what is not of value, the flourishing idea of human life becomes a grab-bag of any human goods that one cares to deem essential. And the same is true for virtues: the exercise of any trait that seems desirable or admirable can be incorporated into the conception of the good life without proof that it really is a virtue.

The trouble with making flourishing the basis of ethics is that flourishing is a rich, derivative concept. One can agree with advocates of flourishing who say that we must derive our ethical principles from human nature, based on what is conducive to human well-being, and that we must apply those principles to our own particular circumstances by a process of practical reason.²⁵ Unlike flourishing advocates, however, Objectivism clearly states what it means to base our principles in human nature. Properly understood, a “flourishing” life *is* a good life, but only because the capacities that are exercised in flourishing are *in fact* conducive to survival. This is true throughout the realm of living things. When we speak of plants as flourishing, we mean that they are strong, healthy and capable of living. Health and strength not only stave off death in the moment, but raise the chances of survival into the future. Every life is a span, and

a human life in particular is a long span: capacities that are conducive to survival increase the likelihood that that span will be prolonged.

Critics of the Objectivist position often wonder how such a “narrow” conception of life can justify such values as art or love. Isn’t survival merely a matter of having shelter, health care and the like? What would a painting or a novel have to do with it? We will analyze the value of art in detail in chapter 4. The methodology we use there recognizes that something that contributes to survival does so over the span of one’s whole life. It tends to extend that span, ward off possible harm, or make one more able to confront harm, as does the vitality of a flourishing plant.

One way in which organisms ward off harm is through developing redundant capacities. Many human capacities, for instance, are necessary for our best chance at survival, but are not immediately fatal if lost. In this respect, a person is rather like the Space Shuttle, which carries back-up computers on board. If any one computer fails, a back-up takes over. As long there is still one back-up left, a computer failure doesn’t cause the shuttle to crash, but it does increase the chances of a fatal failure in the future. No one of shuttle’s computers is absolutely necessary to keep it from crashing, but every additional computer decreases the chances of a breakdown. Because human beings are much more complex than space shuttles, the kinds of useful redundancies we need for our best chance at life are more complex, too. It’s a rare soul who would die for lack of a particular piece of art, for instance, but art works help us to understand and integrate our most basic conceptions, and so make us stronger and more resilient mentally. And that helps us to survive.

When it is based on the concept of life, the concept of flourishing does have a role to play in ethics. While survival is a binary condition, success in surviving is not. Anything that decreases the chances of death, that improves the ability of the organism to keep functioning, that extends or prolongs life, fulfills a need. Someone who has been paralyzed in an accident may be *alive* by the criterion of survival, but he is not doing *well* at surviving.²⁶ Critics of the Objectivist position are often insufficiently attentive to this point. Ayn Rand put it this way: “‘survival at any price’... may not last a week or a year.”²⁷

The concept of flourishing is another way of stressing the biocentric basis of the Objectivist ethics: it is a summary way to designate the condition in which one is achieving one’s values through the exercise of one’s virtues. In this respect it clarifies the link we have established between life and happiness. Meeting one’s essential human needs, through the successful exercise of one’s essential human capacities, in each area of life and across the span of one’s life, is the objective condition that produces happiness. The full life is also a happy one. Flourishing cannot substitute for the alternative or life versus death as the basis of ethics, any more than happiness can. When it is grounded in the requirements of survival, however, the concept of flourishing is a valid and useful

conception of successful life. Like happiness, it gives us a summary perspective on what it means to achieve our ultimate value.

As we develop the ethics of Objectivism, we will be establishing the characteristics of a healthy, happy, flourishing human life. To this point, we have examined the logical basis of ethical inquiry; in the next chapter, we will begin to examine the values that are the key to its content: reason and production.

1 Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* 1012.

2 Even if one does not act on a preference, inherent in the nature of a preference is a desire for the thing preferred, a desire that motivates action unless some other motive supersedes it. The impulse to act is part of all conscious preferences, desires, wishes, and emotions. So if one does not intend to act on that impulse, it is meaningless to speak of having a preference. That is why acting for one's values takes center place in Rand's analysis.

3 e.g. William James "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* [1897] in *Pragmatism and Other Essays* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1963) 218.

4 Analysis in terms of values or goals is called "teleological explanation" and is pervasive in the biological sciences, for good reason. See Harry Binswanger, *The Biological Basis of Teleological Concepts* (Los Angeles: Ayn Rand Institute Press, 1990) Chapter 1, for a more sophisticated discussion of this point.

5 In technical philosophy, this position is known as "agent-relative value."

6 That organisms *face* alternatives is a subtle and somewhat technical point. It is easy enough to see, in the case of a person, what it means to "face" an alternative. We are conscious of both the external world and ourselves. When we act on our awareness, we do so by choice. But a piece of algae, for example, is a vastly simpler organism. It has no nervous system and thus no center of awareness. Its actions are mechanical: necessitated by its composition and environment. How can such a thing be said to "face" anything?

The answer is that an algae's structure and its reactions are such that it responds in complex but orderly ways to changes in its environment. Its behavior is not random or chaotic: it collects nutrients and rejects harmful substances, gathers energy from sunlight and uses it to gather carbon from the air. It *faces* alternatives in the sense that it reacts to its environment in a manner consistent with achieving these goals. And it is no accident that its goals, its *values*, are all means to preserving its life. Natural selection has shaped it so, because nature "selects," as it were, for one criterion only: viability. See

Binswanger, *The Biological Basis of Teleological Concepts*, for more on these issues from an Objectivist perspective.

- 7 As far as we know, it is also true that only living things are valuers, since no other category of existents are clearly capable of initiating action in the face of alternatives. Perhaps humans will one day devise machines that are sufficiently complex to meet this condition; and perhaps we will one day discover goal-seeking entities elsewhere in the universe. In any case, what matters for the Objectivist ethics is that all living things do seek values, not that they are alone in this capacity
- 8 Rand, “The Objectivist Ethics,” in *The Virtue of Selfishness*, 17.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 15.
- 10 Those readers with a background in evolutionary biology may balk at the theory that survival is the ultimate value of all living organisms. Evolutionary biology characterizes living action as pursuing “inclusive reproductive fitness,” which is the robustness of a gene pool or species-population. This is a complex technical topic. In this note, we can only comment that the notion of an organism’s life serving, in some sense, the *survival of its genes* seems to misunderstand the process of genetic evolution. The chemicals in our cells that we call “genes” are not a unified entity, but disparate concretes. A “gene” is an abstraction that unites distinct but similar chemicals that are causally related through natural selection, especially their roles in the construction of living organisms. When an organism reproduces, it creates copies of its genetic material: its own genetic material has no life or continued existence distinct from the organism. Whereas a living organism acts to preserve its own existence as an entity, its genes do not: they are merely reproduced by the organism. Therefore, although it is true that natural selection affects the development of successive generations of organisms, through changes in their genes, the chemicals of which the genes are composed are as much subject to this process as are the structures of organisms. Both genetic material and organisms are adapted through natural selection, but only organisms are adapted to act in ways that preserve their continued, concrete existence. See also Binswanger, Chapter IX, especially pages 153-159, for a discussion of how reproduction relates to life as the ultimate value in the case of non-volitional organisms.
- 11 Technically, we choose only some of our actions: we don’t choose to release digestive enzymes, for example. But we can choose all but our most basic actions and even those are open to modification through means we develop and choose to employ. For instance, we can choose to create or buy drugs to suppress our enzymes.
- 12 See for instance the radical decline of French nationalism following the First World War, or of German and Japanese nationalism following the Second World War.

¹³ Rand, “The Objectivist Ethics,” 27.

¹⁴ See e.g. Paul Ratchnevsky, *Genghis Khan His Life and Legacy*, translated by Thomas Nivison Haining (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991) 153. For a recent survey of research on happiness the evinces the complexity of it as a basis for analysis, see e.g. David G. Myers *The Pursuit of Happiness* (New York: Avon, 1992).

¹⁵ Rand. *Atlas Shrugged*, 1022.

¹⁶ Rand, “The Objectivist Ethics,” 29.

¹⁷ If happiness is an aspect of success in living, why, in this analysis, do we treat it a something distinct from life in the most fundamental sense? In technical philosophy, this question is put by asking why we treat values such as reason and happiness as *instrumental* to life when in fact they are *constitutive* of a successful life. Much is made of this distinction in neo-Aristotelean circles. The virtues of that philosophy are supposed to be “constitutive means” of flourishing (i.e. parts of, or aspects of, flourishing), and thus require no other justification.

In contrast Objectivism recognizes that the instrumental/constitutive distinction is not fundamental. Both types of means are means, and must be analyzed similarly. One might express this point by noting that constitutive means are also instrumental. For instance, the heart is part of the body: it is constitutive of the body. But it is easy to show that the heart is simply a means to the body’s functioning: one can observe what happens when the heart fails. In fact, this kind of analysis is essential to identifying constitutive means: a cancerous tumor is also part of the body, but it is *not* a constitutive means to the body’s survival. Similarly, before we accept that happiness is a part of the good life, we must first show that it is a means to the good life or a result of it.

¹⁸ Rand’s portrayal of reason-emotion conflicts often includes a dramatic twist: the subconscious “sense of life” behind a character’s deepest emotions is more true to his values than his sense of life. Dominique Francon, Hank Rearden, and Dagny Taggart are all characters who grow through learning how to harmonize their reason and emotions.

¹⁹ Rand, “Causality versus Duty” in *Philosophy, Who Needs It*, 99.

²⁰ See Rand, “The Ethics of Emergencies,” in *The Virtue of Selfishness*, 49-56 for a more detailed discussion.

²¹ Rand, “The Objectivist Ethics,” 25.

²² Technically, virtues such as integrity and honesty are dispositions to act in certain ways. At this point in our discussion, the essential point is that it is the effects of the actions to which a disposition tends, that determine whether or not the disposition is virtuous. We discuss the relation between the disposition and action characterizations of virtue in greater detail in Chapter 5.

²³ Economists and game theorists make a distinction that is very useful in this context. Before an action is taken, we have an “*Ex ante*” expectation of its

chances of success. Once the effects of the action have been realized, we know the “*ex-post*” realization. If chance affects the outcome of an action, then one can act reasonably *ex ante* but still have a bad outcome *ex post*. It sometimes happens that what seems like the best action beforehand works out poorly. One may have decided to fly on one’s latest trip for reasons of safety, air travel being rated safest. And then, unfortunately, the plane crashes: was the act of boarding vicious? No. One has to consider the context in which the choice was made, and what was known then.

We often have to make choices in our lives that have long-term, uncertain consequences. In *Atlas Shrugged* there is a situation similar to one that often happens in life: John Galt falls in love with Dagny Taggart, and his love later leads him to put his life on the line for her. Isn’t there a contradiction here? But love involves a profound commitment to the loved one, and incorporating the loved one into one’s sense of self. Galt didn’t form this bond expecting to have to sacrifice his life: he hoped Dagny would settle in the Valley. *Ex ante* Galt fell in love as part of living a rich and healthy life, expecting love to add to his life. *Ex-post*, an unlikely event caused him to put his life on the line for his love. Unless that event was to be expected, he shouldn’t be seen as putting his life and values in conflict.

²⁴ Two notable Objectivist-sympathizers who are advocates of the flourishing perspective are Douglas Rasmussen and Douglas Den Uyl, most prominently in their ethical treatise *Liberty and Nature (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1991)*. See Tara Smith, *Moral Rights and Political Freedom* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995) e.g. p. 67, for an independent Objectivist-influenced construction of the flourishing argument.

²⁵ For a recent treatment of flourishing, which posits a derivation from human nature, see Douglas B. Rasmussen, “Human Flourishing and the Appeal to Human Nature” *Social Philosophy and Policy Winter 1999 (Bowling Green: Social Philosophy and Policy Center, 1999)*.

²⁶ Of course, the physical loss suffered by a paralytic may well be offset to some degree by the technological products of the human mind, which have allowed many disabled people to earn a living, care for themselves, and compensate in other ways for their incapacities. This does not mean, however, that the loss of capacities does not make a person less robust and able than he otherwise would have been, although it does mean that in today’s economy, physical disability is by no means a fundamental barrier to success and achievement.

²⁷ Rand, “The Objectivist Ethics,” 24.

CHAPTER 3: MATERIAL VALUES AND REASON

The Logical Structure of Values

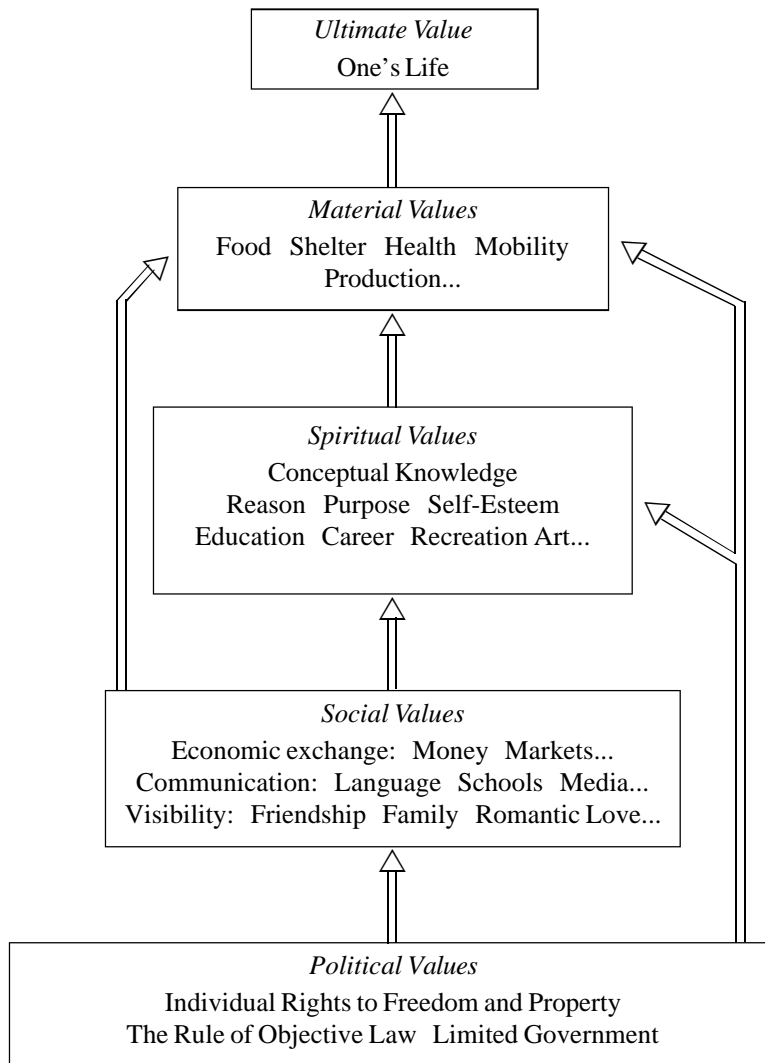
Now that we have established the foundations of the ethics, we are ready to start constructing the Objectivist idea of a good life. Following the pattern of reasoning illustrated in the diagram of the Basic Logical Structure (Diagram 2.3), we can combine our acceptance of life as the ultimate value with our knowledge of human nature to determine the values that man needs. When we know these, we will be able to establish how man should act, i.e. the virtues.

Our basic method of determining values, as we saw last chapter, is causal demonstration: we show that X is a value by showing that it's something we need, i.e., that it would significantly enhance our ability to preserve ourselves.

The needs of the whole person are varied. We can categorize them logically into four groups based on the directness with which they serve life. Naturally, for each category of needs, there is a corresponding category of the values that fulfill those needs. The categories are as follows:

- **Material needs** such as needs for health and food: these values contribute directly to survival.
- **Spiritual needs** such as needs for conceptual knowledge, self-esteem, education and art: these values are *spiritual* in the sense that they primarily pertain to consciousness, and contribute to survival by helping reason to function properly.
- **Social needs** such as needs for trade, communication, friendship and love: these values are *social* in that they occur only through interaction with others. Logically, their status as values is due to the fact that they contribute to the fulfillment of spiritual and material needs.
- **Political needs** such as needs for freedom and objective law, which are needs concerning the organization of society. These provide the context for fulfilling our material, spiritual and social needs.

Diagram 3.1: The Logical Structure of Values



Arrows mark primary lines of logical justification.

Why do we say that material needs are more fundamental than other kinds of needs? The point is one of logical priority, not importance. Because we live in a material world, and are material beings, our immediate needs for survival are material.¹ Values such as food, shelter, mobility, health, and wealth are what we need to stay alive from one day to the next, and provide us with the means to produce more values and thereby fulfill our needs over the long-term.

Our spiritual needs are the needs of human consciousness, insofar as consciousness contributes to survival. Reason, as our means to conceptual knowledge, is the aspect of consciousness that contributes to survival most directly (as we shall see when we discuss reason and production) by making us better able to produce material goods. So the *spiritual* values directly or indirectly contribute to the satisfaction of *material* needs.

Social values are values we gain from interacting with other people, and they also aid our lives indirectly. It is often observed that man is a social animal, but from the perspective of the logical structure of needs, the values we gain from society are truly values only to the extent that they support our lives. And they can do so only as means to material or spiritual values. A similar analysis applies straightforwardly to political values, which are means to the achievement of social values as well as spiritual and material ones. What need have we for freedom, for instance, except that it allows us most effectively to trade with others, form friendships, share knowledge, create art, and secure wealth?

So there is a strict order of logical dependence between the several categories of values: All values serve the ultimate value of life, but the only ones that do so directly are the material values. This order is illustrated in Diagram 3.1: each box contains some of the values, virtues or principles that fall within that category. When we justify any value, our method must be to trace its effects back to the material, survival values it helps us to obtain.

There are in fact complex feedback loops that we can see as our structure of values develops. For example, to fulfill our spiritual needs (with such values as art), we need material means of expression (canvas, clay, paint, pens, film etc.). Art supplies are material, of course, so we would classify them as material values, but they are values only as means to spiritual values. This doesn't change the fact that a spiritual value like art is a value in the first place because it contributes to one's material survival.

Because of this one's wealth, which is one's store of material values, is a means to fulfilling both material and spiritual needs. Everything of which one's wealth is composed has a physical form. Stocks and bonds, for example, represent claims to real assets. However, many valuable items, such as books or works of art, are valuable primarily because of their spiritual significance. So one's wealth is a material value in its substance, but can fulfill more than material needs.

Feedback loops can also enrich our appreciation of established values. For example, wealth is initially justified as an important value because of its direct material benefits. But once we establish what our spiritual and social values are, we will be able to see that the more materially secure we are, the more we can afford time for those pursuits. That means wealth is a more important and multifaceted value than we had thought.

Bear in mind, when you consider Diagram 3.1, that this is not a hierarchy of personal values, but of logical fundamentality. When we justify a logically derivative value, we build it into the structure of the philosophy. Then we have every reason to say that it is a value in its own right, an element in the integrated Objectivist way of life, an aspect of the comprehensive ethical standard of man's life qua man. From a moral standpoint, every aspect of that standard is equally important. From a personal standpoint, a derivative value like aesthetic enjoyment or time spent with a romantic partner might contribute more to one's sense of the meaning of life than does one's job. When we say that material values are more fundamental than spiritual values, we are concerned with the logical order in which we establish that something is an objective value in the first place. Although to justify derivative values you have to consider their place in the logical structure, you shouldn't confuse that structure with the personal hierarchy of values that you form by considering *all* your values in the context of your own life and circumstances.

The Role of Reason in the Logical Structure of the Ethics

Reason, as we remarked above, plays a central role in human life. Reason is not merely a need, but is a necessary means to the achievement of any chosen value. It is man's distinctive means of acting and pursuing his life. This fact depends logically on the key role reason plays in the production of material values.

Establishing reason's central place in man's life provides us with the tool we need to show the importance of spiritual values such as self-esteem. We can prove the worth of spiritual values indirectly, via their contribution to the full and successful exercise of reason. The crucial role that reason plays in human life allows us to trace the logical structure of the ethics through it, making it the super-highway, as it were, of ethical justification.

To exercise reason, we need to employ logic, attend to the evidence of the senses, integrate on the basis of essentials, and so on. But many of our spiritual needs are not components of reasoning in this narrow sense. The rational faculty is an aspect of human consciousness, which is a complex, intricate instrument that has needs of its own. Some needs of consciousness relate to its essential functions, and some relate to the effects or by-products of those essential functions, but all must be fulfilled if the instrument is function well.

Consider a car's motor by way of analogy. The essential function of the motor is to provide power through internal combustion. Internal combustion is the basic driving force of the car; that's what gives it its ability to move. The capacity of internal combustion serves the need of providing power to the wheels. But internal combustion also produces heat, which gives rise to the need for a cooling system: the radiator. And the mechanism that captures the energy suffers from friction, so it needs motor oil for lubrication.

Similarly, reason has its own "radiators" and "motor oil" which make its essential functions possible, but are not part of them. We determine what these needs are inductively, by introspection and by investigating how the human mind functions in others. The findings of specialists in psychology and neuroscience can provide confirmation for our introspective conclusions, and add to the facts available to us. The needs of consciousness include such values as:

- A comprehensive view of existence: Philosophy;
- A way of embodying that view in a concrete, perceivable form: Art;
- A commitment to valuing oneself and one's abilities: Self-Esteem;
- A way of experiencing one's own self through others: Visibility.

(We will discuss each of these spiritual values in Chapter 4.)

So what consciousness needs to keep functioning are the kinds of values that we esteem as the glories of human nature. It may seem demeaning to think that some of your highest aspirations serve as the spiritual equivalents of an oil change, but that is the causal role they play. What makes our spiritual values glorious is, in the end, the glorious powers of the "engine" they serve. Human reason is open-ended, with no natural limits to what it may understand, know, or choose to do, and that is why satisfying its needs is such a distinctive and precious part of living a human life.

Reason and its needs are the key to establishing the spiritual values and the virtues of Objectivism. But before we can turn that key, we have to show that it is strong enough to play that role in the logical structure of the ethics. We have to show that reason is essential to human life. Reason is essential because it is our only source of conceptual knowledge. So the value of reason turns on the role of conceptual knowledge in human life. And the role of conceptual knowledge, for its own part, turns on the fact that production is man's characteristic and most efficacious means of achieving material values. To show this chain of connections between reason and survival, we must begin by considering production's place in human life.

Production and Life

Production is our most important need, because it is our means to the fulfillment of our material needs, and of our other needs through the provision of material means to them. Is production more important than reason? If production were not possible, reason would merely be an open-ended game, not a glory. In fact, in ancient times, before the potential of production was fully understood, philosophers thought the life of the mind to be distinct from the life of the body, and on the basis of that distinction they esteemed the needs of the soul as opposed to the needs of this life.² But without a link to survival, that esteem was essentially an aesthetic preference, not a value that could be justified objectively. Objectivism subscribes to Francis Bacon's dictum that knowledge is power, in the sense that its value is ultimately derived from the practical efficacy it gives us.³

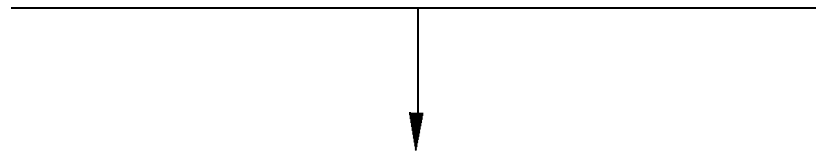
Diagram 3.2 shows the argument for the conclusion that production meets human needs on a greater scale than any other method of survival. It is because of this conclusion that we single out production as the proper mode of human survival. Let's see what goes into it.

Diagram 3.2: Production and Needs

Inductive Evidence:

1, 2, 3, 4: *Human nature, anthropology, economics.*

1) Production is the creation of values.	+	2) Humans can gain values only by taking or producing.	+	3) Only existing material values can be acquired by taking.	+	4) Human needs are unbounded.
--	---	--	---	---	---	-------------------------------



Production satisfies human needs on a greater scale than any other method of survival.

Production is the creation of value. This definition is **Premise 1** of Diagram 3.2, and is derived inductively by observing the different ways organisms gain values. If one doesn't produce, one must take whatever values one finds that can be used without further modification. When a bird comes upon a berry, and eats it, that is merely taking, but when a person gathers berries and makes preserves of them, that is production. Any action by which an organism acquires a value through substantial modification of its environment is production. Animals other than humans produce: beavers build dams and create ponds, for instance, and birds build nests. Human production, however, is on a greater scale than that of other animals, and human production technologies have tended to advance from one generation to the next.

The only alternative to producing values is taking them. When people take from nature, we call that mode of life hunting/gathering, and when they take from other people, we call that theft or looting, but the two involve the same approach to values.⁴ Indeed, a thief, like a hunter, is a kind of predator. Both types of taking are restricted to the values available locally. The hunter/gatherer can only gather as much fruit and meat as the wilderness affords. The looter can only steal what others have already produced: the store of goods available for theft constrains him. In essence, looters are dependent on the willingness and ability of others to produce for them.

These two modes of survival, production and taking, are the only means we have of gaining values. This point, which is also inductive, is **Premise 2** of Diagram 3.2: **Humans can gain values only by taking or producing.**

But why does production merit pride of place? Production is our best mode of gaining values because it allows us to get more than we otherwise could. When we create values, we end up with what we can take, *and* what we've produced, which is more than we can get by taking.⁵ The fact that taking is a strictly limited means of gaining values is expressed in **Premise 3: Only existing material values can be acquired by taking.** Production, because it creates values that do not exist to be gathered from the environment, is not limited in this way.

However, we have yet to establish that our needs are such that we benefit from a mode of gaining values that is open-ended in this way. Do we always *need* more values? Don't most other animals get along well enough with what they've got? We do always need more values, because **human needs are unbounded.** This is **Premise 4** of the diagram. It is an inductive truth we observe in human nature. Economists put it in this way: one can never have too many goods. We can never have too much of what we need: more health, more wealth, more knowledge, more love—more life. This doesn't mean that you always need more of the same things: your house *can* be big enough. Neither does it mean that we have an infinite number of needs. But isn't there always something you could use a little more of? In fact, this is equally true of other ani-

mals—animals benefit from medical techniques discovered by human veterinarians, after all— but they aren't able to do anything about it. We are.

Now we have the **conclusion** we were looking for: because production gains more values than any other mode of survival, and because our needs are unbounded, we can see that **production satisfies human needs on a greater scale than any other method of survival.**

Although the reasoning in Diagram 3.2 is sound, it is based on sweeping inductive generalizations; it is very abstract. So to check to make sure we haven't overlooked anything in forming our premises, we should look for other evidence that bears on the same conclusion. Furthermore, we weren't able to establish by this deductive argument *how much greater* the scale of production is compared with the two kinds of taking. So we could use direct evidence of that, too, if we can find it.

In fact there is a vast amount of inductive evidence about the effects of production on human life. For example, we can point out that all the wealth of a modern developed economy, all the food, clothing, shelter, medicine, communications, transportation, etc., is produced, and in ever-growing amounts. This evidence indicates that the scale of production is vastly greater than that of other modes of survival. In fact, human production has grown over time as if it were itself unbounded.

What would life be like *without* production? For one thing, there would be much less of it, as the evidence from history and anthropology indicates. Until about 10,000 years ago, humans lived as hunter-gatherers. Because the land could support only about one person per square kilometer or about 2.5 per square mile, people had to stay spread out: even a village-sized community was hard to sustain. Murderous conflict between different families, or even isolated individuals, was endemic, because people were in direct conflict for the limited resources.⁶ Life under these "natural" conditions really was (and in remote parts of the Earth still is), as Thomas Hobbes put it, "poor, nasty, brutish, and short."

With the domestication of high-yielding grains and useful animals, people began to change the carrying capacity of the land significantly. Under pre-modern agriculture, technological advance was slow, and for the vast majority of people life was still short and onerous, but population densities could be radically increased, so that a square kilometer could support several hundred people. Actual figures varied between civilizations, and progress was not uniform, but despite its limitations, pre-industrial production made urban life, with its rich arts and complex division of labor, possible.

Since the industrial revolution, which harnessed inanimate energy sources and brought to bear an increasingly deep understanding of the basic physical nature of things, the carrying capacity of land has continued to increase, and in a more dramatic fashion than previously. Production has *created* resources where none existed before: as Ayn Rand pointed out, the oil beneath

the Arabian deserts was not a value to anyone until the industrialists and engineers of the modern petroleum industry invented both a use for, and a means of extracting, it.⁷ Most people in the industrialized world today use very few goods, apart from the air itself, that have not been processed, treated, manufactured, or otherwise altered to better suit our needs. Even when we grow plants, we employ domesticated and hybrid seeds. Even our water has been treated with chemicals to purify it, and stored in reservoirs to insure us against the effects of drought.

The power of production is evident in the increase of world population, from perhaps ten million hunter-gatherers 10,000 years ago, to around one billion people in AD 1750, on the eve of the industrial revolution, to more than five billion today. And this rise in population has been accompanied by a rise in life expectancy at birth from little more than twenty years in the era before agriculture, to more than seventy years, and rising, today.

The causal sequence is: production creates wealth, which raises standards of living and the carrying capacity of resources, which increases longevity and population. These in turn are sure signs that production supports survival. With so much evidence for this conclusion, we can be confident our abstract argument in Diagram 3.2 was not only correct, but too conservative: production satisfies needs on a scale *far* greater than any other mode of survival.

Reason and Production

We now turn to the role of reason in production. In surveying the historical record of production, we noted that its growth has been unending. It is not the human physical capacity for handling goods and making simple tools that has made this unbounded mode of survival possible. After all, chimpanzees can handle physical objects as well as we can. The inventiveness of human production depends not on our physical skills, but on the application of *conceptual knowledge* to the problem of survival. The precise reasons why this is so are outlined in Diagram 3.3: Reason and Production.

Animals other than humans engage in production. But only human production is unbounded. Not only can we produce in ever-increasing amounts, but we can adapt, by production, to survive in almost any environment.⁸ What makes it so? If it isn't due to physical skill, then it must be due to some kind of mental activity. To determine what kind, we must abstract from the many human acts of production the kinds of conscious tasks that go into such them. Essentially, we must inductively investigate the same body of evidence from which we formed the concept of production in the first place.

Animals adapt their actions to causal relationships, but do not grasp them, and so are limited in the scope of their actions. Humans are not limited in the same way, because we can generalize beyond our immediate surroundings. Humans can learn from the way things act under a variety of circumstances

what potentials of action things have. In other words, humans can **understand causal connections**. This is **Part a)** of the first premise of Diagram 3.3. This kind of understanding is crucial to production, because the only way to create new things is to cause things as they normally are to change. And one can only do that systematically if one understands how they will change in different circumstances. That is the source of Bacon's dictum that nature, to be commanded, must be obeyed.⁹

Let's use the production of steel as an example. No other animal produces steel, so we can presume that whatever is distinctive about human production will be at work in this case. To make any metal, one must first identify an ore. But one must also know what can be extracted from it, and how to use fire, and other refined substances, in that process. One has to bear this knowledge in mind, and apply it when one sees ore. This knowledge isn't evident at first glance: metallurgy could not be discovered on the perceptual level.

Being able to grasp causal connections also allows humans to identify what our needs are explicitly. For example, before the discovery of the human need for vitamin C, long distance sea travel was impeded by the tendency of seafarers to develop scurvy. It was only through experimentation and analysis that people were able to understand that scurvy was caused by a dietary deficiency, and what the value was that could fulfill that need.¹⁰ It is this ability to identify our needs conceptually that allows to produce things that are of value to us, and not simply random objects that may or may not serve our needs.

Creating something new also requires that one be able to **project an alternative to what exists**. This is **Part b)** of Diagram 3.3's first premise. It isn't enough to grasp what the causal properties of a substance are, one must also envision ways of exploiting those properties that are not evident in nature. To do this requires the disciplined use of imagination, and imagination, too, is a conceptual capacity. To return to the example of metallurgy, an animal that found a piece of iron would not know what to do with it. But a human imagination could project different forms for it, recall its malleability when heated, conceive of bending it into a useful shape, and so envision making a knife or hoe out of it, for instance, or even a previously unknown kind of object.

Finally, in order to produce one must enact a precise procedure over an extended period of time. In other words, one must **organize a long-term course of action**. This is **Part c)** of Diagram 3.3's first premise. Even agriculture, one of the first productive processes invented by man, requires the careful tending of fields and crops over the course of a year. Some animals, such as bees, have evolved patterns of behavior that organize their actions over the long-term, so that they can engage in an elementary kind of food production. But these patterns of behavior do not adapt to big changes in the environment, or allow the production of new products. But conceptual consciousness can grasp the idea of the future, and plan for it. Humans can organize a long and complex chain of

actions, and adapt quickly to changing circumstances.

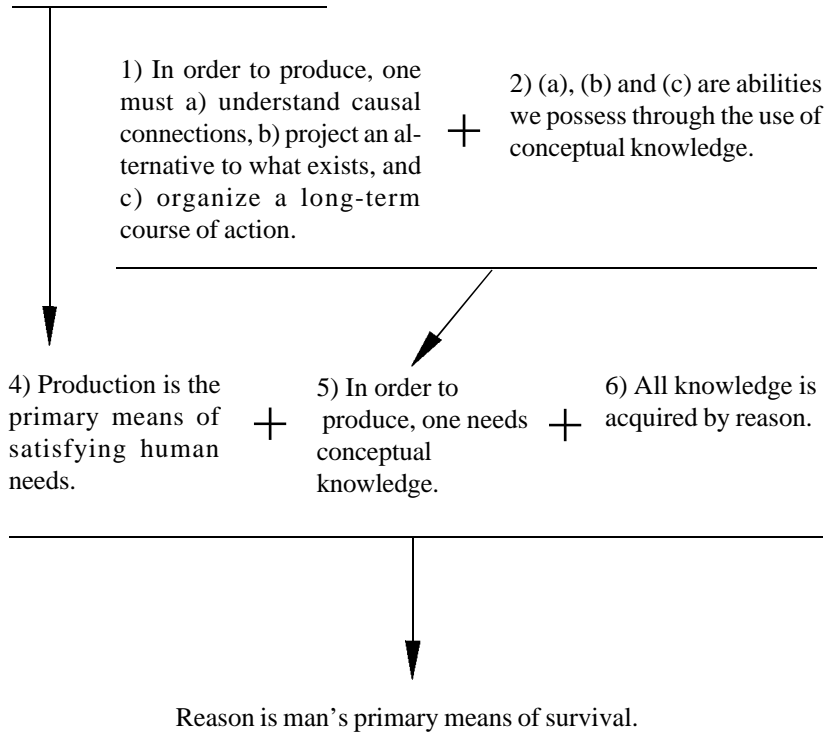
Diagram 3.3: Reason and Production

Inductive Evidence:

1: *Introspection, epistemology*

3) *History, economics, anthropology, public health*

3) Production meets human needs on a scale far greater than any other mode of survival.



The way a piece of sheet steel is made exemplifies the need for long-term planning. Someone must find the ore, identify it, and dig from the ground. It must be smelted, refined, and converted into steel, which is a process for which one needs a hot-burning substance like coke. One has to foresee requirements like that if production is to proceed smoothly. To handle the hot metal,

one must employ new techniques and build specialized tools to roll it out and to create sufficient pressure to flatten it. This immense chain of action cannot occur in the present, and it cannot be perceived, as a whole, by the senses. It is only our conceptual consciousness that gives us this ability to abstract from the present, and organize a number of actions — too many to hold in mind at any one time — into a unified structure, in order to make something unknown to brute nature.

Premise 1 of the diagram summarizes the fact that production has these three essential requirements.¹¹ **Premise 2** states another fact that we uncovered in the foregoing discussion: **each of these characteristics is an ability we possess through the use of conceptual knowledge.** Combined, Premises 1 and 2 give us the straightforward deduction that **in order to produce, one needs conceptual knowledge.** This intermediate conclusion is summarized in **Premise 5.**

Premise 3 at the top of Diagram 3.3 should look familiar, since it is our conclusion from Diagram 3.2, modified by our direct empirical evidence: **Production meets human needs on a scale far greater than any other mode of survival.** This premise straightforwardly implies that **production is the primary means of satisfying human needs.** That intermediate conclusion is **Premise 4)** on the diagram.

Premises 4) and 5) allow us to infer that conceptual knowledge is necessary to all human production. **Premise 6)** expresses the fact that all **knowledge is acquired by reason.** So reason is necessary to all human production. In fact, if we reflect on the facts behind Premise 1), we can see that reason is the means by which we go about producing. In other words, reason is our means of engaging in our best means of acquiring material values, and thus of surviving. So Premises 4), 5) and 6) combined, including all the facts they incorporate, give us our conclusion that **reason is man's primary means of survival.** We do not possess instincts of sufficient strength to secure our survival, or indeed to guide our actions even in a fairly limited context. In place of detailed instinctive responses that dovetail with the exigencies of our environment, we have evolved the capacity to understand the world abstractly, and to act on that understanding by grasping causal relationships, projecting alternatives to what exists, and organizing our actions over long periods of time.

Unit-Economy and the Need for Reason

The logical analysis outlined in the preceding section typifies the means-end reasoning characteristic of ethics. We showed that production is a value directly related to human survival, and then showed that conceptual knowledge, and thus reason, are necessary means to that end. The Objectivist ethics, however, asserts a more general proposition: that reason is necessary to the achieve-

ment of *any* value. How do we establish this more general claim?

Following the same pattern, we would need to establish what other things are values, and then show how reason is necessary to their achievement. As we noted earlier in the chapter, however, values in categories other than the material—i.e., spiritual, social, and political—arise from the needs of reason itself. That is why we had to establish the importance of reason in the first place by showing its relation to material production. As we turn to the other categories of values in succeeding chapters, it will become clear why reason is a necessary means to the satisfaction of its own needs: reason is our means of acquiring self-esteem, producing art, trading with others, creating a free society, etc. In this way, the general claim that reason is necessary for the achievement of any value can be supported by inductive inference from its role *vis-à-vis* specific values. We have already surveyed one instance of this evidence, namely the role of reason in production.

But there is a feature of reason itself that provides a general rationale, at the outset, for the proposition about its value as a means of achieving values in general. The ability to think abstractly allows a mind of limited capacity to grasp an open-ended range of facts. Ayn Rand called this function *unit-economy*: the reduction of a vast welter of information to a limited, comprehensible number of units.¹² Whatever values we pursue, the achievement of unit-economy is a vital means. Diagram 3.4 examines the value of reason as a means of achieving unit-economy.

Premise 1 states the basic reason why one needs unit-economy: **one can consciously attend to only a small number of units simultaneously.** This does not mean that our knowledge is limited; rather, it means that the number of distinct mental units on which we can concentrate our attention in any moment is limited. This is an inductive point about the human mind, one that has been confirmed by numerous psychological studies.¹³ Introspectively, we can observe this phenomenon in our own attempts to hold many units in focus. For instance, take the sequence AG6T. This is easy to remember, isn't it? Take a look, close your eyes, and focus your mind on it. You've got it, right? Now try to do the same with this longer string of units: AC8ZXJE6Y3NLS243. Take a look, close your eyes: what is it? The longer string exceeds your ability to directly grasp, at the perceptual level, a number of distinct items.

Premise 2a restates the definition of a concept: **a concept is an integration of units on the basis of common features and differences.** From this premise, which we first discussed in Chapter 1, we can infer that concepts can provide us with unit-economy: **A concept integrates an open-ended number of concrete units into a single new unit.** This conclusion is **Premise 2.**

Using concepts, we treat any number of things that are similar—i.e. that fall within a delimited range of difference—as if they were the same. We create a new mental unit, the concept, to which we attach a symbol, such as a

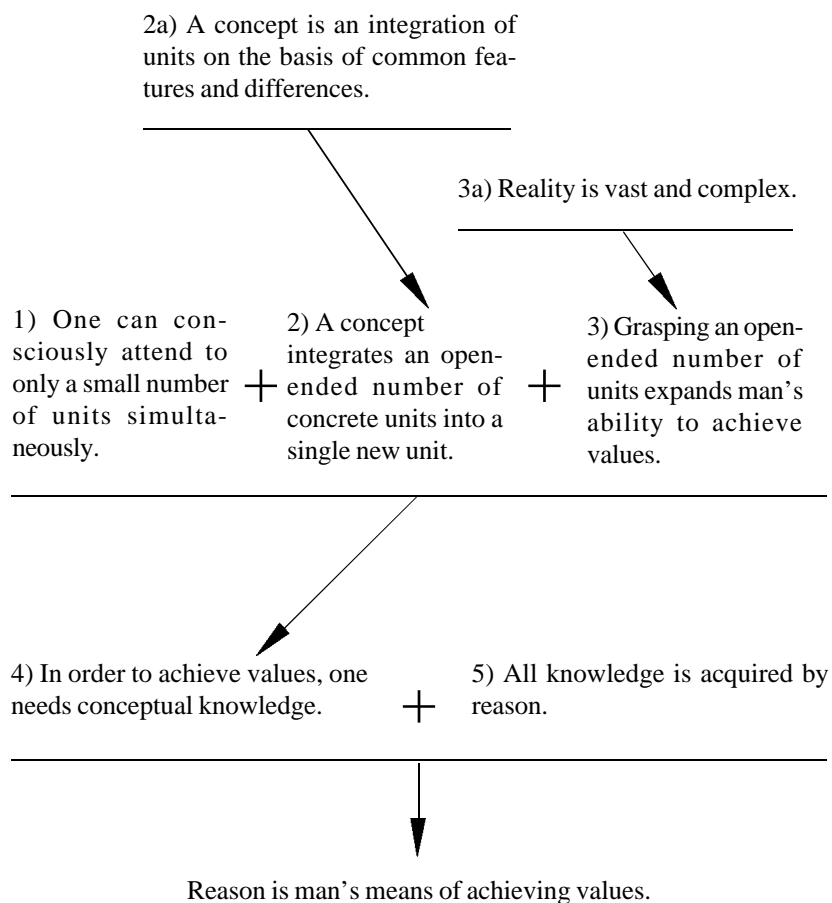
word, as a perceptible marker. That single new unit then stands for all the particular units of the concept. We can hold that single new unit in mind, allowing us to concentrate on all the units of a concept abstractly, without having to hold every one of them in mind at the same time a distinct unit. We can grasp, for instance, that dogs bark, without holding in mind every single, distinct dog and every distinct sound they make.

Diagram 3.4: Unit-Economy and Reason

Inductive evidence:

1, 2a: *Introspection, psychology.*

3a: *Perception*



But why do we need to grasp more than a limited number of units? If the world were very simple, with values few in number and easy to identify, and the means of achieving them equally simple and obvious, then perhaps we could live at the perceptual level, simply by “sniffing them out.” But, as **Premise 3a** notes, in fact **reality is vast and complex**. There is an extremely large quantity of important facts that are too complex to directly grasp at the perceptual level. We can infer from this that **grasping an open-ended number of units expands man’s ability to achieve values**, because it makes one aware of a wider range of facts than could perception. This intermediate conclusion is **Premise 3**. No matter what sort of purpose or end one wants to achieve, being able to reduce a large amount of information to a manageable number of cognitive units enhances one’s chances of success.

We can infer from premises 1, 2, and 3 the conclusion that **in order to achieve values, one needs conceptual knowledge**. This is **Premise 4**. It is comparable to Premise 5 in Diagram 3.3, but it applies to all values, not just production. (At the same time, the earlier premise about production is an instance of inductive evidence for Premise 4.)

As in Diagram 3.3, we must refer to the role of reason in order to reach our conclusion. As noted in Chapter 1, **all knowledge is acquired by reason**. Reason is the capacity for and process of integrating perceptual data in accordance with logic. This fact, which is **Premise 5**, allows us to conclude our diagram with the generalization that **reason is man’s means of achieving values**. By comparison with the conclusion of Diagram 3.3, this is the more general conclusion we sought.

The argument in Diagram 3.4 cannot take the place of Diagram 3.3 in the logical structure of ethics. Because the most fundamental values are the material values, it is reason’s role in the creation and acquisition of these values that must provide the rationale for regarding reason as man’s key faculty. If it were the case that our survival depended primarily on brute strength, or good tree-climbing skills, or some other physical capacity, then reason, while surely of some significance given the facts we have identified in Diagram 3.4, would still be relatively trivial. Diagram 3.4 expands our understanding of our need for reason, but it is reason’s role in production that makes it our primary means of survival.

Thinking in Principles

Now that we better understand the value of conceptual knowledge, we can turn to the value-significance of thinking in principles. Objectivism is distinctive for the importance it attributes to the role of principles in human cognition, because they are one’s means of integrating one’s knowledge of a given subject or field. Of course, the term “principle” has long been associated with

ethical commitment. Christians, for example, refer to people of great moral rectitude (by Christian lights) as people of principle. But notice the crucial difference between this traditional view of principles, and Objectivism's view. To a Christian, principles are merely rules, and being principled means adhering to those rules without regard for circumstances. In fact, principles identify key facts. This means that principles are contextual, and that they are not something one obeys, but rather something one understands. As we will see when we discuss the virtue of integrity, a committed, principled person is one who stands by and acts upon his essential understanding of reality, not someone who rigidly follows rules set down from above.

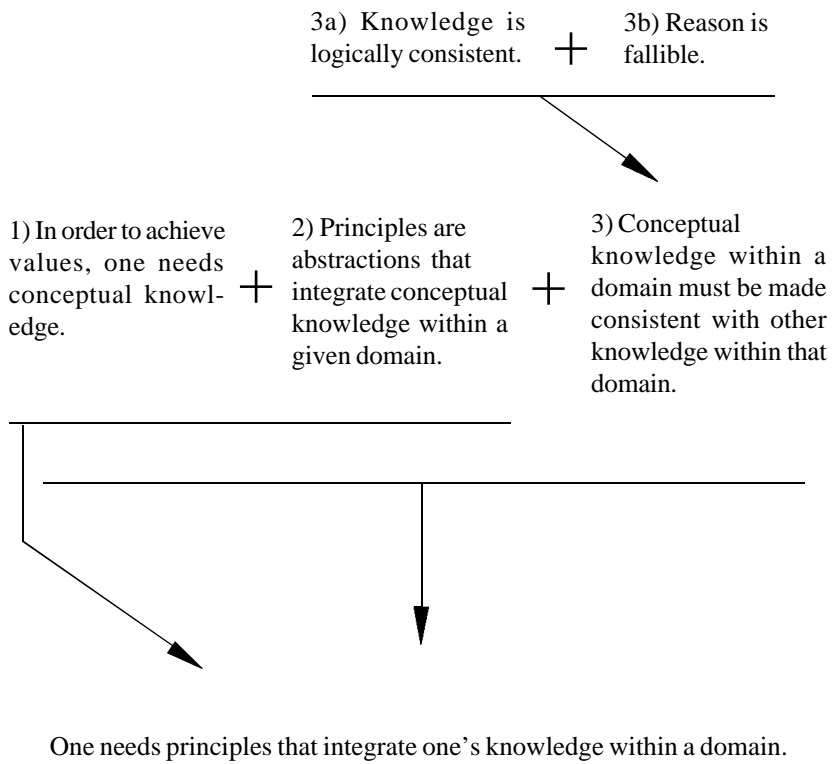
Why are principles important? At the conceptual level, as we have seen, we grasp the world abstractly. Our concepts identify particular existents that are essentially similar. When we form propositions out of our concepts, we can identify and express whole facts at any level of abstraction, from simple identifications such as "The sky is blue," to *principles* such as "Man needs freedom." Principles are propositions of a special kind: propositions that identify facts of importance, and that unify our understanding of an issue or subject. To do this, as Ayn Rand noted, a principle must be "a fundamental, primary, or general truth, on which other truths depend."¹⁴ Principles identify key, overarching facts about a subject, and they are thus always related to a goal or purpose, although this purpose is often simply the comprehension and explanation of interesting phenomena. The principles of biology, for instance, are for the purpose of understanding the nature of life. The principles of auto-repair are for the purpose of fixing cars. It is only through principles that we can have a unified and consistent overall grasp of a subject. This is valuable both as the means of grasping a disparate set of facts as a single thought, i.e. as a means of exploiting the unit-economy of concepts, and as a means of ensuring the consistency of our conclusions.

Diagram 3.5 examines both these aspects of our need to think in principles. **Premise 1** summarizes our findings, which constitute the principal conclusion of this chapter: **in order to achieve values, one needs to use conceptual knowledge**. This covers the general need for conceptual knowledge, as the source of unit-economy, in the pursuit of any values, as well as the role that various functions of conceptual knowledge play specifically in production. **Premise 2** adds the relevant fact about principles: **principles are abstractions that integrate conceptual knowledge of a given domain**. A principle is thus a means of grasping, as a whole, a fundamental fact about many disparate concretes. Take the principle that rent controls cause shortages of housing, which we discussed briefly in the introduction. This means that rent controls on this house, that house, and the apartment down the street are all fundamentally similar, and the same goes for rent control in this city and that city, this country and that country, this century and another century. The principle thus unites our

grasp of the features of rent control in the many places, times and forms in which it can be found, and allows us to hold that unified understanding in mind. This is the sense in which principles fulfill the function of unit-economy: they allow us to reach and understand conclusions at a high level of abstraction, packing a great deal of information into a unit as small as a sentence.

Diagram 3.5: Principles

Inductive Evidence:
2: *Introspection, psychology.*



We can therefore conclude from premises 1 and 2 that, in virtue of the unit-economy that principles provide, **one needs principles that integrate one's knowledge of a domain.** Because one's principles integrate knowledge of something fundamental, they are powerful means of understanding the world.

In addition to unit-economy, principles also are our means of ensuring the consistency of our knowledge of a given subject. **Premises 3a** and **3b** are statements about conceptual knowledge that we discussed in Chapter 1. The first asserts that **any item of knowledge must be logically consistent with all other knowledge.** This is something we established in Diagram 1.4; it is an obvious implication of the axiomatic law of non-contradiction. **Premise 3b** asserts that **reason is fallible**, a conclusion established in Diagram 1.5. When we apply these two generalizations to our grasp of any specific area of knowledge, we can see that our knowledge of that particular area a) must be logically consistent, but that b) such consistency must be *achieved*; given our fallibility, it cannot be taken for granted. In other words, if we have beliefs that are not consistent, at least one of them must be in error, and therefore is not knowledge. So we can infer **Premise 3** from premises 3a and 3b: **conceptual knowledge within a domain must be made consistent with other knowledge within that domain.**

Because principles integrate knowledge of given domain (premise 2), it is by means of principles that we can check the consistency of our knowledge. Simply having principles does not banish contradictions from one's thoughts. But the process of integrating one's understanding into principles, of determining the fundamental characteristics of a subject, involves seeing how one's various conclusions on more concrete matters square with each other. For example, an economist studying grain markets may come to the conclusion that price controls lead to market distortions, while finding that interest-rate regulation assures social harmony. By attempting to form a principle that addresses the effects of price controls generally, he will find himself needing to square his conclusion on interest rates with his conclusion regarding grain markets. The apparent contradiction—interest rates are prices, too, after all—implies that he has made an error somewhere, though perhaps it may lie in seeing a fundamental similarity between credit and grain markets. It is only by seeking out fundamental principles that he will be able to sort this out.

From the need to ensure that our knowledge is consistent—i.e. from premises 1, 2 and 3 together—we can again infer the **conclusion that one needs principles that integrate one's knowledge within a domain.**

What the diagram shows, to summarize, is that one needs to think in principles in order both to achieve the benefits of unit-economy and to ensure the consistency of one's conclusions. Both aspects of principles are essential to the use of conceptual knowledge and thus to the pursuit of all the values that depend on such knowledge. As Ayn Rand wrote: "It is only by means of prin-

ciples that one can set one's long-range goals and evaluate the concrete alternatives of any given moment."¹⁵

Thinking in principles does not mean ignoring concrete details, or clinging to one's abstract conclusions in the face of contrary perceptual evidence. But it does mean integrating one's discoveries with one's other knowledge, and formulating one's conclusions about significant subjects in clear terms, so that one can easily grasp and employ that knowledge. As we will see in chapter 5 when we discuss integrity, it also means relying on one's principles when one is unable to take account of every minute detail in a situation, as is often the case.

We will revisit the theme of thinking in principles in future chapters, as when we discuss reason as a cardinal value, or our need for philosophy as our most abstract and universal body of principles. Of course, it also a key to the method of this book, since we are surveying the vast content of a philosophy by means of a relatively small number of principles and diagrams.

Conclusion

The pattern of reasoning in this chapter has been that reason is man's primary means of survival because reason is necessary to production, and thus to all the material values we can produce. We have also seen why, in virtue of unit-economy and the use of principles, reason is a necessary means of achieving all the other values we pursue—a conclusion that will be reinforced in later chapters as we discuss the other categories of value. It is because reason is essential to the pursuit of life and happiness that we will be able, in the chapters ahead, to determine the further values and virtues of Objectivism by reference to the rational faculty and its needs. The first category of nonmaterial values we will consider are the *spiritual* values, which follow directly from the nature and needs of reason.

1 By contrast to the Objectivist position, the character in Madonna's hit song "Material Girl" (which did spring to mind when this section was being composed) considers the logical structure of values to be her value hierarchy. She doesn't merely think material values are fundamental, but that they are also the values of greatest personal importance.

2 This view is typical of Classical philosophy, for instance, from Plato and Aristotle to Plotinus. (*cite?)

3 Sir Francis Bacon "De Heresibus (Of Heresies)" in *Meditationes Sacrae*.

4 Even most hunting or gathering involves the use of some tools, but without

effects nearly as significant as open-ended production. Admittedly, however, few Homo Sapiens have ever been pure hunter-gatherers in the way a lion or monkey is.

- 5 If this would seem to endorse a “prudent predator” life strategy (one of producing when one must and taking when one can) please recall that this argument is only intended to prove that production is our most effective means of getting values. There is a more developed argument in favor of production as against both forms of taking, but that depends on the relationship between reason and production, and such virtues as independence and justice, all topics that would be premature at this point in the logical structure of the ethics.
- 6 In addition, in hunter/gatherer societies, with people so spread out, it is very hard for relationships based on trust to develop. See e.g. Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel* chapter 14 for a discussion of these societies.
- 7 Cite: Rand on discovery of oil in Arabia. In Reisman?*
- 8 See Julian Simon, *The Ultimate Resource 2* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996) for a thorough theoretical and empirical discussion the capabilities of production.
- 9 Sir Francis Bacon *Novum Organum* Book 1, Aphorism 129.
- 10 Ernest Lovell Becker, editor, *International Dictionary of Medicine and Biology, Volume III* (New York: Wiley, 1986) 2559.
- 11 The three conceptual aspects of production in Diagram 3.3 are not simply necessary to the invention of new productive means, but to any production. Consider the most rote job in a factory: the worker would still have to understand that he would only be paid if he did the work (understand causal connections), he would have to understand what would happen if he did not get paid (project an alternative) and he would have to understand that he must show up for work regularly everyday (undertake a long-term course of action). Any economic exchange has these characteristics, and a similar analysis can be applied to the actions of the most humble peasant farmer.
- 12 Rand, *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology, Expanded Second Edition* 63.
- 13 A classic formulation of the psychological point is George Miller, “The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two; some Limits on Our Capacity for Processing Information,” *Psychological Review* 63 (1956), 81-96.
- 14 Rand, “The Anatomy of Compromise,” in *Capitalism: the Unknown Ideal*; 144
- 15 *ibid.*.

CHAPTER 4: SPIRITUAL AND SOCIAL VALUES

The Cardinal Values

We've now established the central role of reason in human survival. With his open-ended, objective knowledge, derived by reason, man is able produce his material values in limitless ways. Just as the cognitive use of reason allows man to acquire knowledge indefinitely, using each new conclusion as a stepping-stone to the next, so the productive use of reason allows man to create wealth indefinitely, using each new achievement as a stepping-stone to the next. Taking this as background, we are ready to demonstrate how spiritual values fit into the structure of Objectivism. We will start with the most abstract, yet from a personal point of view, most important, spiritual values. These are the values that orient the rest of the ethics. Ayn Rand called them the *cardinal values* of Objectivism: reason, purpose and self-esteem¹.

To live, man must hold three things as the supreme and ruling values of his life: Reason — Purpose — Self-Esteem. Reason, as his only tool of knowledge — Purpose, as his choice of the happiness which that tool must proceed to achieve — Self-Esteem, as his inviolate certainty that his mind is competent to think and his person is worthy of happiness, which means: is worthy of life.²

The cardinal values are not external goods, things we get from the environment. They are fundamental aspects of the process of living. We have a psychological need to hold these values consciously, to esteem them, because doing so provides us with an objective internal orientation toward the world and toward our own lives. This is why the cardinal values are best understood not as particular things we aim to gain and keep, once and for all, but as values that we reaffirm with every thought and act.

Our need for these cardinal values follows from the fact that we have free will. Most organisms automatically act to support their lives, but Man's nature is different. We must choose our values, and it is only by choosing to act in support of our lives that we can achieve well-being. This choice is *the choice to live*.

Ayn Rand held that all of ethics should be based on following through, rigorously and consistently, on the choice to live. In diagram 2.1 we saw, in

concluding that life is the ultimate value, that a key premise for that conclusion was the need for consistency in one's hierarchy of means and ends, i.e. in one's values. On a day-to-day basis, holding one's life as one's ultimate value is not a trivial task. To consistently pursue the aim of living, one has to have a clear idea of its key elements, and one must be motivated psychologically to exert the effort required to uphold those elements. By consciously holding the cardinal values as our highest spiritual values, we can orient our pursuit of life on the basis of essentials. In other words, holding the cardinal values gives clear, psychological content to the choice to live.

Diagram 4.1: The Cardinal Values

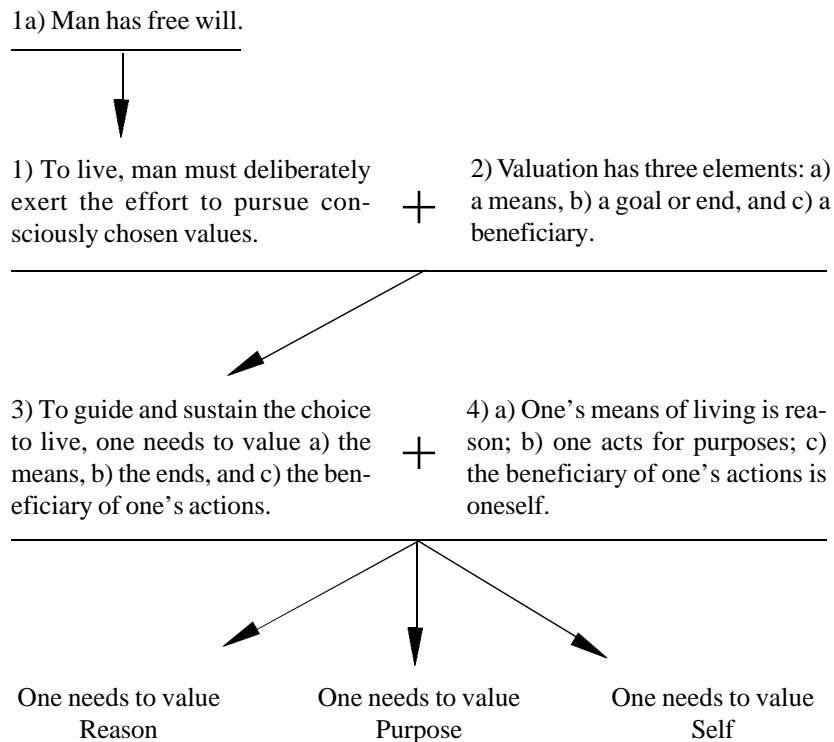


Diagram 4.1 takes us step by step through this reasoning. As we go through it, the essential connection between the cardinal values and the choice to live will become more apparent.

Premise 1a restates the fact that **man has free will**, which, as we have seen, is an axiomatic fact of which we are directly aware in every conscious thought. Free will is actually a complex phenomenon, because it is not merely the fact that we can cause our own actions, but that we can do so self-consciously. From this, we can infer the conclusion stated as **Premise 1: To live, man must deliberately exert the effort to pursue consciously chosen values.** Our free will precludes our seeking values automatically, as other organisms do. Of course our bodies pursue many values automatically—digestion of food, circulation of the blood, etc.—but we could not survive long without values gained through conscious action. The most abstract way of expressing this truth is that, in order to live, we must choose to do so.

Recall that in Chapter 2, we concluded our examination of the biocentric essence of the concept of “value” by recognizing that **valuation has three elements: a) a means, b) a goal or end, and c) a beneficiary.** This inductive generalization is **Premise 2.** In Chapter 2, we saw that each of these three major elements is present in the basic features of any goal-directed action:

- a) Goal-directed action involves the exercise of a capacity
- b) Goal-directed action is directed to an end, i.e. something valued
- c) Goal-directed action is for the sake of its agent

Let’s take a perfectly mundane case of human value-seeking: going for a jog. How would we analyze this action? The end the jogger seeks is physical fitness, to which the exercise contributes. The means of achieving fitness is the physical activity of running, for which one needs the capacities of healthy legs, back, heart, and so on, and the will to direct those physical capacities. Finally, someone stands to benefit from the action: the jogger, whose ability to live is enhanced by his fitness. We can break down any value-seeking action into these three elements.³

Premises 1 and 2 of Diagram 4.1 lead us to conclude that **to guide and sustain the choice to live, one needs to value a) the means, b) the ends, and c) the beneficiary of one’s actions.** This conclusion appears as **Premise 3** on the diagram. Please note that “to value” in this case means not simply to pursue an end, but to esteem that end consciously as well. Holding the cardinal values means doing so consciously, as an explicit choice.

Premise 4 expresses these elements of human valuing in more specific terms: **a) One’s means of living is reason; b) One acts for purposes; c) The beneficiary of one’s actions is oneself.** This is the basis of the cardinal values of Reason, Purpose and Self. Each of the cardinal values corresponds to a fundamental element of goal-directed action. In other words, every action we take in support of our lives implicitly involves the pursuit of these three essential values. Because they are essential, to the extent that one fails uphold any one of

them in the course of one's actions, one fails to act for one's life.

We can therefore reach three **conclusions** from premises 3 and 4, corresponding in turn to parts a, b, and c of those premises. The first conclusion is that **one needs to value Reason** as one's most essential and most powerful capacity for action. The second is that **one needs to value Purpose**, i.e. one's values and ends. Finally, **one needs to value Self**: oneself as the proper beneficiary of one's actions.

As Diagram 4.1 makes clear, the choice to live amounts to the choice to use one's reason, to act for one's purposes, and to act for oneself. Holding these three values as guiding, overarching, *cardinal* values is our means of consciously orienting our actions around the choice to live, and motivating ourselves to continue to exert the effort that the choice to live requires. In a sense, then, each of the cardinal values is simply the ultimate value of one's own life, seen from a particular angle. In affirming any of the cardinal values, one is affirming an essential, constituent aspect of the process of living of itself. As will be clearer shortly when we discuss each of them in turn, the cardinal values involve a rich appreciation of what it means to live as a human being and what that life requires.

Being elements of valuing, the cardinal values both abstract aspects of life, and orient us toward certain actions. As we describe them in more detail, we will often touch on policies of action in discussing our proper orientation toward action. Some of the generalizations about policies of action will require further elaboration, which we will provide in Chapter 5, when we discuss the virtues of rationality, productiveness, and pride. The discussions of inductive evidence that accompany the presentation of each cardinal value should help you grasp clearly the content of these orientations as values, and it is this content that we will be using in future diagrams to develop the structure of the ethics.

These values are implicit in a healthy, happy life, which depends on the actual use of one's mind to achieve goals that benefit oneself. But one cannot expect to achieve these values with any consistency without making them *explicit*. Indeed, the failure to hold them explicitly and to pursue them by conscious, deliberate choice has caused a great deal of unnecessary suffering, grief, and death.

Consider, for instance, someone who wants to live a happy, healthy life, but deprecates reason. Such a person would tend to slide into emotionalism and a short-sighted hedonism. A similar person who deprecates purpose instead of reason would tend towards a classic pragmatism, and would find little satisfaction in a life of conflicting aims and unpleasant long-term consequences. Someone who deprecates self is perhaps the most frightening of all, because he will usually embrace some larger beneficiary of his actions, such as God, Virtue, the State, or perhaps the Race. From such a mold have sprung not merely

relatively benign figures like Mother Teresa, but Hitler and Torquemada as well.

There is an illuminating analogy between the cardinal values and the axioms of awareness with which we began this book. The axioms are implicit in every moment of awareness, but holding them explicitly allows us objectively to orient our thinking, which, being free, is prone to drift into errors such as contradiction, wishful thinking, or failure to check one's thinking against the facts. Denying the axioms leads to inaccurate thinking and undermines one's knowledge, while attending to them helps to ensure objectivity.

Similarly, the cardinal values are implicit in every value-seeking act. But holding them explicitly allows us objectively to orient our values, which, being freely chosen, are prone to errors such as conflicting aims, self-destructiveness, and the indulgence of subjective wishes that Ayn Rand called "whim worship." Denying the cardinal values undermines one's life and creates unhappiness, while esteeming them helps to ensure that one's pursuit of values is properly life-affirming.

From this, we can see that to uphold the cardinal values is to uphold the choice to live without contradiction or diversion. This is not trivial; it requires a continual conscious commitment. To see this in more detail, we will now consider the meaning of each the cardinal values in turn:

Reason as a Cardinal Value

Many people have noticed the curious fact that Rand describes reason not only as a virtue — rationality — but also as a value; not only as a means to our ends, but as one of our ends. She did this because, as we have seen, reason as a faculty does not operate or develop automatically. It is our most important capacity, and we need to understand its nature and value it consciously.

To value reason is to value the processes and cognitive products of the mind, in all their various forms. Valuing it means valuing one's cognitive contact with existence. In addition, because reason is one's capacity for a *conceptual* awareness of the world, valuing reason means valuing the integrated, self-directed, open-ended acquisition of conceptual knowledge, by means of observation and logical integration.

We saw in Chapter 1 that reason integrates the evidence of the senses (Diagram 1.4), and that it must adhere to the standard of objectivity if its integrations are to produce knowledge of the world (Diagram 1.5). *Integration* and *objectivity* are thus the two essential poles of reason as a cardinal value, values we aim at, implicitly, in all rational cognition. The unit-economy of concepts (Diagram 3.4), propositions, and principles (Diagram 3.5) results from integration. The process of concept-formation (Diagram 1.2) is integrative, as is the inductive learning by which we expand our knowledge. So to value reason as the engine of integration means to esteem the constant acquisition of knowledge and the cultivation of skills such as logic, literacy, numeracy, and rhetoric

(skills that can serve both poles, but that can only be acquired by integration).

The pole of objectivity regulates and corrects our integrative processes. Objectivity is based, as we have seen, on the recognition that knowledge is contextual and volitional (Diagram 1.5), and thus subject to error. Its methods include the reduction of abstractions to their basis in perception (Diagram 1.2) and the employment of the canons of deductive and inductive inference.⁴ Our use of principles of logic to achieve objectivity is one instance of the broader fact that principles as such are vital means of checking the consistency of our knowledge (Diagram 3.5). Objectivity means trusting in one's own perception of reality as the final test of one's conclusions. To value reason as objective means appreciating the harm that internal conflicts and contradictions can cause if allowed to fester unresolved, and being psychologically open to the potential for error: certainty does not justify a closed mind. Because our means of tolerating contradictions in our thinking is evasion, to value reason is to despise evasion, especially in oneself.

A failure to appreciate the inseparable character of these two poles of reason underlies the epistemological errors of mysticism and skepticism. Mystics have felt "limited" by the demands of objectivity. Skeptics have rebelled at the effort and judgment that integration requires. Both deprecate the human mode of knowing the world, when they rather should celebrate it. A faculty that one deprecates is not likely to be used properly, nor to its fullest potential. This is not merely a matter for intellectuals or scholars; in ordinary life, an appreciation of the powers of one's capacity for knowledge, and the benefits that flow from it, are what motivates one to improve one's thinking skills and enrich one's sphere of knowledge.

In addition to the evidence of the value of reason that we have already discussed and analyzed, we can draw on social science for direct evidence of the need to regard reason as a fundamental, orienting value. For instance, psychologists note that to the extent that a person disables his means of grasping reality, he tends to also lose his sense of control, leaving him prey to rootless, floating anxieties. These anxieties can be extremely debilitating and distracting. The subject is thus less able to secure his well-being, not only because of his irrationality, but also because of the indirect effects of suffering under anxiety.⁵ There is also psychological research showing that a commitment to active thinking and to the use of one's rational faculties helps deter senescence and improves quality of life for the aged.⁶

History is another source of evidence: we can observe the pernicious effects of irrational zealotry on people in the past (and even the present) in such episodes as religious wars. Examples include Europe's Thirty Years War, a religious war that laid waste to Germany; China's mysticism-inspired Taiping Rebellion; and the post Cold-War sectarian genocide in Yugoslavia. Deprecation or misunderstanding of reason and its requirements have played an important

role in avowedly “rational” social movements such as those that drove the French and Russian Revolutions, respectively, to their destructive culminations. Of course, such assessments of historical events rest on analyses of these episodes too detailed for us to present here; we can only suggest further readings.⁷

Speaking more generally, we can see that there have been periods in history, such as the European Dark Ages (circa 400AD–circa 1200AD), when the elevation of faith above reason was associated with widespread suffering and high mortality rates. Similarly, we can observe periods or places dominated by a rational, inductive spirit, such as the Anglo-American Enlightenment (circa 1690AD–circa 1812 AD) or China’s Song Dynasty (960AD–1279AD), in which the practical employment of reason resulted in commercial and technological advances and increases in population and living standards.⁸ A lesson emerges from the evidence: those who esteem their minds tend to keep them longest, and a society characterized by esteem for the mind tends to be conducive to the welfare of its members.

Purpose as a Cardinal Value

The value of purpose seems paradoxical. A value by nature is something we seek, i.e., a purpose; and to seek purpose is to value it. The concepts of purpose and value, as we noted in Chapter 2, identify the same fundamental phenomenon from different perspectives. Is it not a category error to make purpose itself a *value*? Is the value of purpose then an instance of itself?

The solution to this paradox lies in the diagram. We do not pursue our values automatically, as other species of animals do, through impulses that operate without volition. We must consciously select our goals and initiate from within, by an exercise of will, the effort to pursue them. Many people dread this responsibility. To value purpose is to welcome it. Over and above our particular goals in life, we need to value the having of goals and the deliberate pursuit of them.

In her discussions of the cardinal values, Ayn Rand often related the value of purpose directly to her principle that “productive work is the central purpose of a rational man’s life...”⁹ To establish the significance of this principle we will need to flesh out the logical structure of our values and virtues in more detail, so in this book we will address this aspect of purposeful action in Chapter 5, when we discuss the virtue of productiveness, and again in the Conclusion, when we sum up the overall significance of the philosophy. However, as diagram 4.1 shows, the value of purpose is required for the pursuit of *any* concrete value.

Given the knowledge we have developed so far of the nature of human action, we can see that purpose as a value has the following key elements:

- The commitment to act for our values in reality. Deliberate action begins

with an intention to pursue something we value. An intention is an idea, a projection within our own minds of what it is that we seek to obtain. To value purpose is to esteem the process of acting on our ideas, carrying through on our intentions, achieving our goals for real, rather than letting an intention remain in the mind as an unrealized wish. This aspect of purpose as a cardinal value is expressed in *Atlas Shrugged* by Dagny Taggart's reflection, "First, the vision—the physical shape to express it. First, the thought—then the purposeful motion down the straight line of a single track to a chosen goal. Wasn't it evil to wish without moving—or to move without aim?" (230)

- The constant, ongoing commitment to acting on purpose, to knowing what one is doing. Acting without any goal in mind is the flip side of desiring a goal without acting for it. To value purpose is to reject arbitrary, aimless action ("moving without aim"), but its primary worth is as a positive appreciation of the meaning of one's actions. Ayn Rand idealized this attitude toward life in her depiction of Francisco D'Anconia as a teenager, in *Atlas Shrugged*:

"He flew through the days of his summer month like a rocket, but if one had stopped him mid-flight, he could always name the purpose of his every random movement. Two things were impossible to him: to stand still or to move aimlessly."¹⁰

- The commitment to orchestrating our purposes in the service of our lives. The goals we seek from moment to moment are not discrete and independent ends. They serve our larger, longer-term ends in a complex hierarchy of values. So the control of action by purpose also means appreciating the ultimate ends implicit in subordinate ones. It means cultivating a sense of priorities so that one knows clearly why the things one is doing now are more important than the things one might have been doing otherwise. Our concrete values—work, hobbies, dining options, recreational activities, social interactions, and so on—make competing claims on our time, effort, and other resources. To resolve these conflicts, we must make deliberate decisions about the relative importance of these values in reference to our basic purposes.

- As an orientation toward the world, finally, valuing purpose means valuing achievement and the creation of value. We have seen how important the production of values is to human life. Valuing purpose implies valuing the phenomenon of creation *per se*, valuing discovery, invention, production, improvement, getting things done, and making a difference in the world. It's the orientation of a valuer, an entrepreneur of life.

Thus it is no paradox to say that, in light of our capacities for reason and will, it is a value to human beings to have values. It is not enough that something objectively meets one of our needs. We will not act for it unless and until we consciously value it. For example, a career can be an important value,

for reasons that we will explore later in the chapter. But a person is not born pursuing a career. In searching for a particular career to adopt as one of his important purposes in life, he is motivated by the purpose of having such a purpose.¹¹

Our basic purposes are what give us a sense of meaning in life, and there is abundant inductive evidence that having a sense of meaning is a spiritual need. We can observe the numerous people who live aimlessly, without direction or conviction in their activities. These are people whose lives are filled with regrets and dreams left unfulfilled. Indeed, most of us have introspective evidence of how easy it is to drift along without an overall sense of purpose, and of how unsatisfying it is to live that way. The depth of this need for a sense of purpose is illustrated by the perennial concern about the meaning of life, both in popular self-help literature and in the work of great philosophers and artists.¹² The psychological study of depressed people is another source of evidence for this point. One important symptom of depression is mental listlessness, a lack of engagement with one's values and life—and a loss of desire to have or pursue any values in the first place, with the result that one's life seems utterly without meaning.¹³ This condition is so painful that seriously depressed people are at risk for suicide.

The need for conscious attention to the hierarchy of our purposes can be seen most clearly in social contexts. Prioritization is usually something that occurs within one's mind, but the need to prioritize comes out into the open in any large organization, in which people must work together to achieve common ends. Business firms, which are customarily committed to profit as their fundamental goal, provide us with evidence of the need to prioritize in their explicit expressions of purpose, such as "mission statements." In addition, there is often tension between different groups in a firm (management, workers, and owners, for instance) over whether it is properly oriented toward its purposes.¹⁴ Historically, we can observe cultures characterized by an esteem for progress, purposefulness, and creative endeavor, and these cultures tend to also be characterized by improvements in human welfare. For example, these attitudes toward achievement were common in the West during the industrial revolution of the 19th century, and in rapidly developing East Asia during the second half of the 20th century.¹⁵

Self as a Cardinal Value

Ayn Rand called the final cardinal value "Self-Esteem." We have called it the value of Self. This change in terminology reflects a small but significant change in our conception of the nature of this value. To value oneself is, of course, to esteem oneself. But self-esteem as conceived in the Objectivist literature is a narrower concept; it is only one element in the cardinal value of self.

The reasons for this change are both philosophical and psychological. They will become clear as we proceed, but the essential reason is this:

In her formulation of the cardinal values, Rand described self-esteem as “the inviolate certainty that [one’s] mind is competent to think and [one’s] person is worthy of happiness, which means: is worthy of life.” These two elements, self-confidence and self-worth, are indeed crucial elements in valuing oneself. But they have to be acquired. They have to be earned. In particular, at least in Rand’s conception, self-worth is essentially a *moral* appraisal of oneself, based on the character one has acquired through a consistent practice of acting on principle. In our view, this aspect of valuing oneself is neither broad enough nor fundamental enough to be considered a cardinal value. Why should we seek to acquire character? What motivates the effort to achieve this value? If life is our ultimate value, why do we need to prove ourselves worthy of life? And what about aspects of ourselves other than competence and character, attributes such as temperament, personality, interests? Are these aspects of our identity not to be valued?

There must, it seems, be a more fundamental commitment to oneself, a commitment that explains the need for self-esteem as a specific spiritual value and motivates us to achieve it. On our analysis, this commitment is to oneself as the *beneficiary* of all the actions one takes in pursuing one’s life. If the root of the cardinal value of purpose is an esteem for and commitment to *my life* as an ultimate end, the root of the cardinal value of self is an esteem for and commitment to *my* life, to myself as an ultimate beneficiary of my actions. The concept of value, Rand noted, presupposes an answer to the questions, “Of value to whom? and for what?” The point of the first question is that there are no intrinsic values, i.e., no things that are valuable in themselves apart from the benefit they confer on a valuer. As volitional beings who must seek these benefits for ourselves by deliberate, self-motivated action, we need to act from a profound esteem for ourselves as beneficiaries.

The core elements of this esteem include:

- A commitment to one’s happiness. We saw in Chapter 2 that happiness is the response to the achievement of values. Because it is a response—and specifically an emotional response—it cannot serve as the basic standard of value. It cannot tell us how to identify or pursue a consistent hierarchy of purposes. As a response to achieving values, however, happiness is the reward we enjoy for our achievements, for success in living our lives. It is the reward we enjoy as beneficiaries of our goal-directed actions. In this respect, to value oneself is to value one’s happiness as an end in itself; to seek happiness without compromise, sacrifice, apology, or guilt; and not to give up on the quest for happiness in the face of problems, losses, and disappointments.
- Valuing ourselves as unique individuals. Valuing ourselves as beneficiaries of our own goal-directed actions means valuing the *whole* self—not merely

the abstract notion of oneself as beneficiary, but the particular, individual person one really is. Though Objectivists have not yet produced any systematic theory of selfhood and personal identity, it is clear that each individual has a unique constellation of attributes, including his skills, knowledge-base, memories, aspirations in life, interests, personality, style of thinking and acting, and character, as well as his physical appearance and capacities. Without an acceptance and appreciation of one's individual identity, the commitment to act on one's own behalf would obviously be undermined. Happiness, moreover, is not an automatic, mechanical result of achieving one's goals in the external world. It requires that we stop to "smell the roses," to take conscious satisfaction in the things we have achieved and to appreciate their personal significance for us. In other words, both the motivation to initiate action, and the capacity to enjoy the results, presuppose an appreciation of our identity.

- A commitment to growth. By contrast with other animals, human beings are capable of substantial continuing growth and spiritual development even after they have reached adulthood. We have already discussed the fact that reason allows us to expand our knowledge in a continuous, open-ended manner. The same is true for other aspects of the self. There is no set limit on the continuing development of our skills, our capacity to enjoy life, and our character; and as we develop these traits we increase our prospects for happiness and success in life. But, as with all other values, we must deliberately exert the effort to pursue self-development. Man, as Rand often said, is "a being of self-made soul." Self-esteem as she defined it—the conviction that one is both competent and worthy to live—is the crowning achievement of this investment in oneself.

It is this thoroughgoing appreciation of the value of oneself that the ethical doctrine of altruism seeks to ignore. Many are the moralities that place responsibility and blame upon the individual—especially the productive, capable individual—and yet deny him the benefit of his own actions. He will *produce* the goods, and others—the tribe, the state, the needy, the primitive, the aristocrats, all of society—will *enjoy* them. This sunders responsibility from worth. Altruism is often presented in the guise of benevolence and generosity, through a narrow equation of self-interest with a kind of ethical solipsism. But this presents a harmful ideology under the cloak of social values that, as we shall see, do not depend on it. A person who values himself will hold himself consistently as the ultimate beneficiary of his actions, and not allow the value of his life to become obscured in the complexity of his engagement with society.

It is natural that we can find ample direct, empirical evidence that that appreciation of oneself, as beneficiary of one's actions, is a key value for human survival. As we've seen in examining other values, history is a vast record of the experiences people have had holding various kinds of values. Cultures that explicitly deprecated the value of self have been quite common, from the Ancient

Spartans to 20th Century Communists. The ethics of self-sacrifice have caused numerous conflicts and inflicted vast amounts of human suffering, culminating this century in the great totalitarian genocides committed by German Fascists, and Russian, Chinese and Cambodian Communists.¹⁶ Notice that social movements such as fascism can at once be evidence of the effects of the rejection of reason and of the embrace of altruism; the intellectual causes of historical events are often multi-fold, to say nothing of the non-intellectual causes.

We all have plenty of relevant experience of our own, both from introspection and from observing the behavior of others. You can probably notice that people who feel unworthy or chronically guilty are under-motivated and that they have unhappy social lives. Women have commonly experienced deprecation based solely on their sex, and many have limited themselves because they have accepted a negative assessment of themselves. While pride is widely condemned, genuine confidence in oneself is probably rarer than is egotism.

Furthermore, this has been a substantial field of study for psychologists, for instance in the ever-growing literature on the importance of self-esteem in daily life. This research shows that enriching one's appreciation for oneself is integral to leading a successful and happy life, and that people of low self-esteem are vulnerable to such maladies as chronic anxiety and often lack the inner strength to respond to negative, external shocks in a robust manner.¹⁷

Cardinal Values: Conclusion

The cardinal values orient the rest of our values, and motivate us in our pursuit of our lives and happiness. In this role they constitute a constant reaffirmation of the choice to live. But of course, as appreciations of and commitments to our most essential capacities, they are naturally still rather abstract. This may seem to give them the flavor of the optional.

After all, one could easily go through life at half-throttle, with a "sort-of" commitment to oneself, if it's not too hard, and a "sort-of" commitment to one's happiness, putting up with not feeling especially happy so long as life is not too stressful. One could be satisfied with "kind of" having cognitive control, accepting the fact that most of the world is a fog as long as one can get along all right in one's immediate surroundings. But the result would be a life half-lived, both in the literal sense of having a reduced chance of survival, and in the figurative sense of a passionless, meaningless, empty life.

One way to see the importance of the cardinal values is to imagine an exercise you might go through at the end of each day. As you are lying back in bed, reflect on the day just past: "There is a finite number of days in my life, and this one is gone. How did I spend it? Did I have a purpose to what I did? Or was I just drifting through this day, letting whatever happened happen? Given my purposes, did I adopt the best, most rational means to them, or was I acting in a

confused, self-defeating manner? Did I act for myself? Was it *my* interests and happiness that was driving me today, or was it what I thought others wanted?”

If your answers to these musing questions don't amount to the reaffirmation of your cardinal values, then you probably had a frustrating, unsatisfying, misdirected day; the sort of day you would like to live over again, but can't. Staying committed to Reason, Purpose, and Yourself as cardinal values keeps you on track for making every day an effective and fulfilling one.

Other Spiritual Values

The word “cardinal” normally means primary or first in order. The cardinal values are *not* first in the order of deriving the moral code of Objectivism. That status belongs to production, which provides for the material needs essential for our survival. Reason is next in order, as the means of production and thus our basic tool of survival. But man's rational faculty is a highly complex capacity, with its own needs that must be satisfied if it is to be exercised and relied upon to its fullest extent. These needs give rise to the realm of spiritual values. It is within this realm that reason, purpose, and self-esteem are cardinal values. Because reason is volitional and self-conscious, we need three over-arching commitments: to reason itself as a method of knowing and acting, to purpose as the end that governs our actions, and to ourselves as the beneficiaries of our actions. They are primary in the sense that they can and should be pursued in every use of the mind in every deliberate action, playing a role analogous to the axioms in cognition. These values are also first in the order of derivation within the spiritual realm, and we can now go on to show how other spiritual values can be derived from them (in conjunction with direct inductive evidence).

To illustrate the pattern of derivation, let us begin with two simple cases, education and career, whose relation to the cardinal values is too obvious to require diagrams. We will then move on to several further spiritual and social values whose derivation follows the pattern in a more complex way. These include philosophy, art, and visibility.

Education

Education is the process of acquiring knowledge from others in a systematic way. Education includes both the learning of methods through training and practice and the systematic study of established bodies of substantive knowledge. It may involve actual instruction by teachers or a self-directed course of reading and study. As a process of acquiring knowledge, education differs from first-hand discoveries by observation and experimentation because it is a process of learning things that others have already discovered. And, because it is systematic, education must be distinguished from casual reading, conversation,

and other non-systematic ways of learning things from others.

Why is education an important value? Specific elements of an education relate directly to specific goals such as production. But the general value of education as such relates to the cardinal value of reason. To value reason, as we saw, is to value the integrated, self-directed, open-ended acquisition of knowledge. Thus, to value reason is to value the acquisition of conceptual knowledge as such, by any means. But why does this require that we value education, as a specific means of acquiring knowledge? To answer this question, let's look at the two distinguishing features of education.

1) Why do we need to acquire knowledge from others? Any complex body of knowledge, such as that which we rely on in modern life, includes a vast number of sophisticated integrations and inferences, which it took many other minds working over thousands of years to create or discover. It would be impossible for a person, starting as an infant, to discover for himself on his own and over a lifetime the basic knowledge which the average high-school student learns today. Education is only way to acquire knowledge on this scale.¹⁸ The cardinal value of reason, therefore, together with the inductive observation about the vast amount of already-established knowledge, implies that education is itself an important value.

2) As for the other element in our definition—the *systematic* aspect of education—the fundamental explanation is that knowledge is hierarchical. This means that some items of knowledge presuppose others: one has to discover or learn things in their proper order.¹⁹ One can't simply pick up knowledge willy-nilly. This is true of knowledge as such, at any level, in any degree. But the need for systematic procedures increases exponentially as the body of knowledge to be acquired becomes larger, more abstract, and more complexly interrelated. Given the magnitude of the knowledge we need today, as described in the preceding paragraph, the hierarchical nature of knowledge requires a highly systematized sequence. To appreciate this point—and to confirm it inductively—consider just the two major features of a systematic education: the division of knowledge into subjects like mathematics, geology, and history; and the gradations within any subject from introductory to advanced. Could you have learned what you know today if the material you had to learn had not been classified into subject areas? Imagine listening day after day, year after year, to a stream of information from mathematics, history, English literature, chemistry, philosophy, economics, art history, etc., all intermixed in random order. As for the progression within subjects, from introductory to advanced, imagine trying to learn calculus before arithmetic. Imagine trying to write a doctoral thesis on the depression of 1893 without any background in economics or American history.

It is obvious that education is the only means of acquiring anything like the literate, numerate, theoretical, and factually rich body of knowledge available today to anyone who values reason.

Career

Most people conceive of their lives as divided into specific areas such as work, family, friends, romantic relationships, health and self-improvement, leisure, and the like. People differ, of course, in the way they make these distinctions, but the tendency to distinguish is common—and reasonable. Areas of life are defined and distinguished from each other by the specific goals, relationships, and kinds of activity involved. The Objectivist ethics as presented in this book is concerned with principles that apply universally to all of life, but a full development of the ethics would show how the principles apply in particular ways to particular areas. This would be a complex task, because the specific values we pursue in a given area typically relate to more than one of the broad universal values at the base of the ethics. Career is a good example of this pattern, and we discuss it here because among the fundamental values it serves are the cardinal values of purpose and self.

A career is the systematic pursuit of productive achievement, on a rising scale, in a particular line of work. Having a career is a long-term project. It means working through a series of related jobs or posts, increasing one's capacity to create value through the acquisition of knowledge, skill, and experience. Of course, having a career needn't mean climbing the corporate ladder, or pursuing readily marketable skills: that is a question of personal preferences and circumstances. But whatever one's career values are, one needs to systematically pursue the improvement in one's ability to achieve them, because doing so contributes to the following more fundamental values:

A career is a means to the end of production, since concentrating on a specialty in work improves one's productivity over time. Of course, work of any kind is productive as long as it creates value, even if it does not involve a deliberate, systematic, long-term pursuit of rising achievement. Indeed, for most of history, most humans engaged in largely repetitive, cyclical work such as farming that involved little if any gain in productivity or wealth over an individual's lifetime. But as we saw in discussing production, our need for wealth is open-ended, so the additional gain in productivity that comes from careers obviously serves this need.

But the subject of this chapter is our spiritual ends. How does a career serve these ends? To begin with, it serves the cardinal value of purpose. A career organizes one's specific, day-to-day purposes around the deliberate, systematic, long-term purpose of improving one's means of survival. A person who drifts from job to job, concerned only with paying the bills, may have a purpose for each of the particular things he does. The same is true of the person who works from a sense of duty, concerned only with keeping his otherwise idle hands busy. But neither of these people has an overarching goal that unites their work activities over the course of a lifetime. A career gives us a hierarchy of

values in our working lives, and thus a more purposive means of choosing among opportunities than is available to someone not pursuing a career. At each point in time, each stage along the way, a person with a career is concerned not only with the requirements of the job at hand but with its potential for giving him the new knowledge, skills, and opportunities he seeks in order to expand the scope of his productive achievement in the future. Valuing one's career is thus an important way of valuing purpose, paying attention to one's purposes and making sure one's activities achieve their ends.

Developing one's career is also a means to the end of self-esteem. We saw that one of the elements in self-esteem is a confidence in one's fundamental competence to live. Self-supporting work of any kind helps one achieve this confidence through the activity of meeting one's basic material needs (a phenomenon to which we will return in Chapter 5 when we discuss productive work in more detail). Young people frequently experience this spiritual aspect of work with particular intensity when they take their first job, receive their first pay-check, and know that they have achieved a new level of self-reliance. The same aspect of valuing the self is served more fully when one organizes one's working life around a career, which provides continual satisfactions of meeting new challenges, relying on one's own thought and judgment in ever more complex ways, and achieving an increasing measure of control over one's fate. A second important way in which a career serves the value of self follows from the fact that careers are chosen. To make a choice about the kind of work one will pursue over the long term, one must consider one's own needs, interests, abilities, and tastes. One must look for a fit between the objective requirements of the work and the highly personal traits that determine whether one will be find fulfillment in meeting those requirements. In other words, one is not only the agent and purposive initiator of a career but its beneficiary as well, spiritually no less than financially.

Thus a career is an area of life that offers many opportunities to gain important, fundamental values. This is why it deserves a high place in one's personal hierarchy of values.

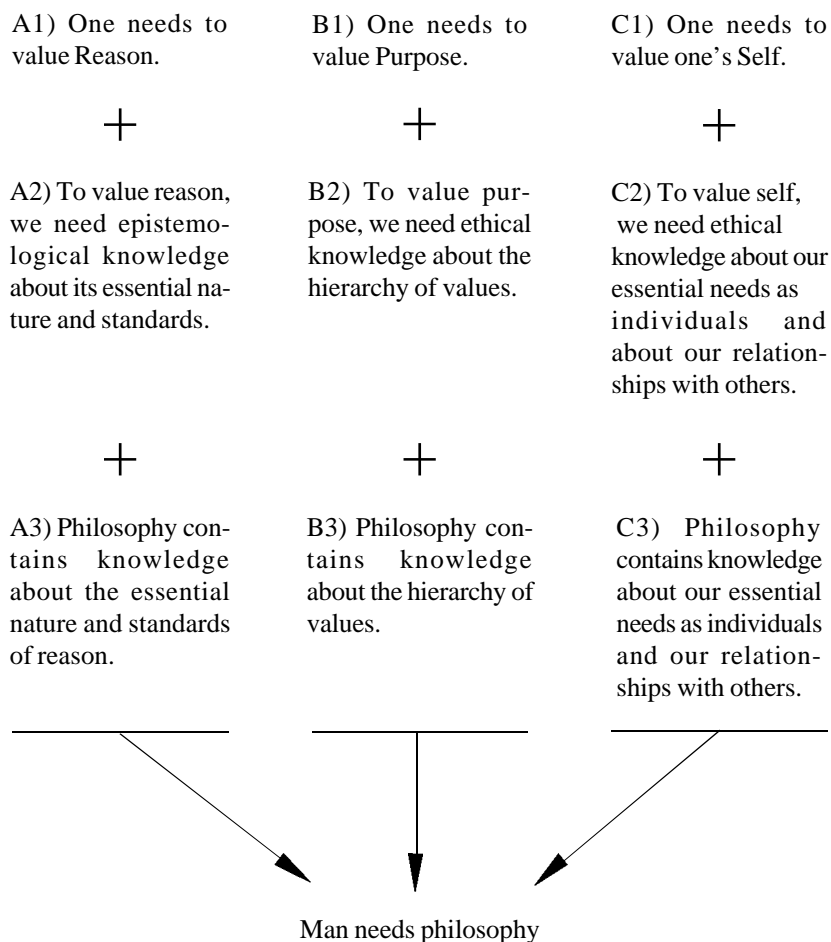
This brief discussion of education and careers illustrates, in a relatively simple form, how the cardinal values underlie other, more specific spiritual and social values. With this understanding, we can now turn to several other cases in which the derivation is more complex and less obvious. Indeed, for each of these further values—philosophy, art, and visibility—Objectivism has an original explanation of *why* they are valuable.

Philosophy as a value

This book is devoted to laying out the rationale behind a comprehensive world-view and ethical system, in other words, a philosophy. So far we

have taken it for granted that philosophy is a valuable body of knowledge. This is natural, since the foundational information in metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics that we need in order to show the value of philosophy is itself part of philosophy. Now we have developed enough background to make this value explicit. That background includes the discussions of the cardinal values, of knowledge in chapter 1, and of principles in chapter 3.

Diagram 4.2: Cardinal Values and Philosophy



Diagrams 4.2 and 4.3 present two distinct rationales for philosophy as a spiritual value. Recall that, in Chapter 3, we saw that principles were valuable in virtue of two facts: that they allow us to grasp large amounts of knowledge in a compact form, i.e., they provide *unit-economy*; and that they allow us to insure that our knowledge is *consistent*. Because philosophy is a body of principles—principles of ethics, principles of metaphysics, etc.—it partakes of the dual function of principles. On the one hand, philosophy is a body of specific knowledge about the formation of knowledge, rules of inference, the nature of values, and so on. The theme of Diagram 4.2 is the value of that knowledge in itself. In addition, philosophy is an overarching world-view that subsumes and integrates all our specialized knowledge. The value of philosophy as an integrator is the theme of Diagram 4.3. Let's take these two themes in order.

Premises A1, B1, and C1 of Diagram 4.2 remind us of our need to pursue the cardinal values. The argument proceeds as three distinct, though similar, chains of reasoning. Each chain of argument in the diagram—A, B, and C—shows how the fields of philosophy serve as means to each of the cardinal values, respectively.

The premises labeled “A” show how philosophy serves the value of reason. **Premise A1** states that **one needs to value Reason**. **Premise A2** points out that **to value reason, we need epistemological knowledge about its essential nature and standards**. As we have seen, epistemology teaches us what our means of knowing are. It is the branch of philosophy concerned with the nature, acquisition, and validation of knowledge. Among other things, it studies the methods and standards of definition and logic, without which even moderately sophisticated reasoning is impossible. Direct evidence of premise A2 is all around us, not only in the thinking methods we use every day, but in the errors of knowledge that come from a failure to embrace the right epistemological standards and methods. We can see this quite regularly in fields such as politics and journalism, where many people fail to employ basic standards of reasoning, as is evidenced by the widespread use of fallacious argument forms. The appeal to majority is quite common, for example, in the way polls of popular opinion are cited in the popular media, and confusion between statistical correlation and causation is rife in popular discussions of health and environmental risks.

History provides additional inductive evidence that the nature and methods of knowledge are not obvious, and that they require the acquisition of epistemological knowledge. In the West, as far as we know, it was not until the ancient Greek civilization that humans first grasped the concept of proof by rational demonstration. And it was not until the scientific revolution of the 16th and 17th centuries that methods of induction by experiment were discovered. Before that era, the prevalence of faith and authority as means of knowledge was partly due to simple ignorance.

Premise A3 adds the point that **philosophy contains knowledge about the essential nature and standards of reason.** In other words, epistemology is part of philosophy. So philosophy fulfills our need for epistemological knowledge. Together, premises A1, A2 and A3 lead us to **conclude** that philosophy is a value, i.e. that **man needs philosophy.**

Now let's trace out chain B. **Premise B1** is that **one needs to value Purpose.** **Premise B2** adds that **to value purpose, we need ethical knowledge about the hierarchy of values.** To pursue our purposes, it is obvious that we must know what to pursue. As we saw in discussing purpose as a cardinal value, we need a commitment to our own lives as ultimate goals in order to motivate the pursuit of any lesser goals. It is ethics that tells us that life and happiness are ultimate values. To choose how to apportion our time and effort, moreover, we need a clear hierarchy of values. The hierarchy rests on fundamental values of the sort covered in this chapter and the previous one, and these values, too, are established by ethics.

Premise B3 states that **Philosophy contains knowledge about the hierarchy of values.** In other words, ethics is also a branch of philosophy. Together, premises B1, B2 and B3 make it clear that philosophy is a value, in this case because it teaches us about values.

The line of argument labeled C follows a similar pattern, focusing on the ways that philosophy serves the cardinal value of Self. **Premise C1** is: **one needs to value one's Self.** **Premise C2** elaborates on the implications of this fact: **to value self, we need ethical knowledge about our essential needs as individuals and about our relationships with others.** In discussing self as a cardinal value, for example, we saw that a sense of one's competence and worth is a crucial need. We also saw that valuing the self is incompatible with altruistic self-sacrifice. These claims are validated by ethics. Over all, ethics tells us about the values that go into the good life, the flourishing life, that we should seek for ourselves. It also tells us how other people can help or hinder that aim. **Premise C3** concludes the point by noting that **philosophy contains knowledge about our essential needs as individuals and our relationships with others** i.e., that ethics is included in philosophy. Together, premises C1, C2 and C3 entail the **conclusion** that **man needs philosophy.**

Philosophy is the most general of the sciences. It is a body of knowledge about how the world works and how man relates to it. Each of the three arguments in Diagram 4.2 traces the way an aspect of philosophy applies to one of the three broadest values man can pursue. In a sense, this shows the value of philosophy as a *specialized* body of knowledge. As Ayn Rand put it in summary fashion:

In order to live, man must act; in order to act, he must make choices; in order to make choices, he must define a code of values; in order to

define a code of values, he must know what he is and where he is—i.e., he must know his own nature (including his means of knowledge) and the nature of the universe in which he acts—i.e., he needs metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, which means: *philosophy*.²⁰

But there is another, independent reason for the importance of philosophy. The argument represented in Diagram 4.3 shows why the *universal* nature of philosophical knowledge is also a value.

Philosophy integrates the knowledge of the sciences and summarizes the broad universals that provide their foundation. Philosophy is one's way of grasping the answers to questions about the overall nature of the world and the meaning of life. Of course, in a sense we can *see* the world, and *feel* what life is like. But this perceptual awareness is limited to the particulars of the moment: what we actually see is *this* desk, *these* trees, *those* children, and so on. We cannot hold in mind, as a perceptual integration, how all the things we have ever been aware of fit together, and of course we cannot have a perceptual awareness of things we have never directly encountered.

Ayn Rand noted that everyone forms some kind of integration that provides an overall assessment of the world, at least at the subconscious level. She called this integration one's "sense of life."²¹ Philosophy brings this assessment out in the open, in a conceptual form that we can consciously consider and understand. It takes a welter of feelings, observations, and assumptions about the way things add up and transforms them into an explicit view of the world. Once it is explicit, we can determine whether it is accurate, or if it needs to be changed.

Philosophy is distinctively valuable because it allows us to see how all our knowledge comes together. It allows us to see whether conclusions we have formed in disparate areas of life and study can be squared with each other. Once again, Rand states the point forcefully:

If it should be asked...: Who, then, is to keep order in the organization of man's conceptual vocabulary, suggest the changes or expansions of definitions, formulate the principles of cognition and the criteria of science, protect the objectivity of methods and of communications within and among the special sciences, and provide the guidelines for the integration of man's knowledge?—the answer is: philosophy.²²

We saw in Chapter 3 that principles are the means by which we ensure the consistency of our knowledge of an area or domain. Most principles apply to a fairly restricted context, and given the differences between those contexts, we can form principles that seem entirely distinct. Integrating our ideas is a

valuable activity because it helps us check the validity of conclusions, particularly highly abstract conclusions which can more easily conceal subtle errors than can more concrete judgments.

A scientist, for example, may base his knowledge of the physical world on his work in the laboratory, while learning about values and human relations in a church. His method in the laboratory involves mathematical precision, careful experimentation, and painstaking measurement, whereas life in society involves vague language, haphazard interaction, and intuition, so it might seem natural to him that the moral laws of the church, which apply to life in society, are not subject to the same rigorous evaluation as the laws of physics and chemistry, which apply to experiments in the lab. He might therefore take no umbrage at his church's emphasis on faith in addressing spiritual and moral issues. Yet his failure to integrate these disparate fields means that he allows contradictions, and therefore falsehoods, in his thinking.

In diagram 3.5, we inferred that, because contradictions are impossible, and because reason is fallible, **conceptual knowledge within a domain must be made consistent with other knowledge within that domain.** Here, this is **Premise 1** of diagram 4.3.

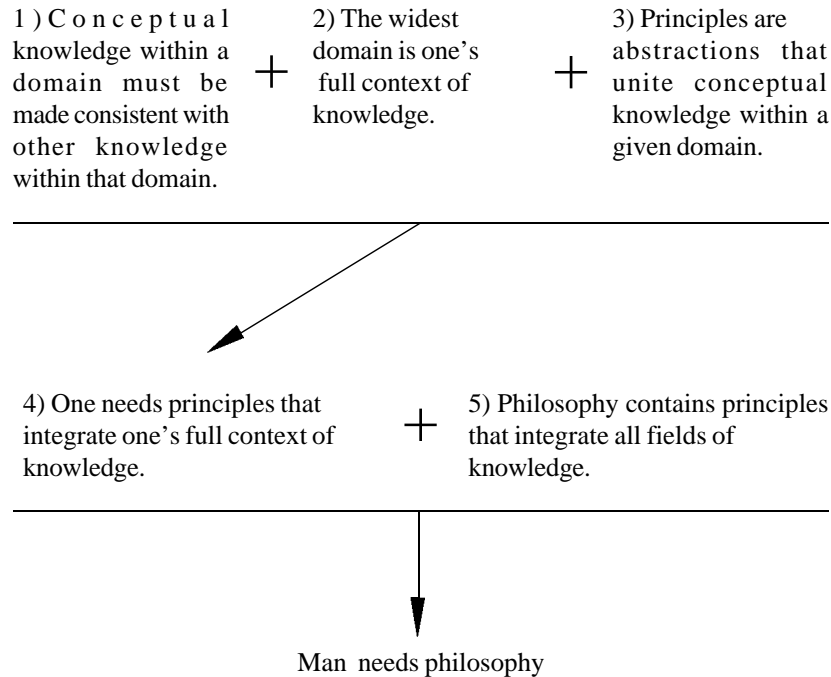
Premise 2 expresses the straightforward fact that **the widest domain is one's full context of knowledge.** For an individual, the full context includes everything he knows, in every subject and every area of life, along with the totality of lifetime experience that is available to him as a basis for his conclusions. For a society or civilization, the full context includes everything that has been established as true in every branch of inquiry. **Premise 3** restates premise 2 of diagram 3.5 : **principles are abstractions that integrate conceptual knowledge within a given domain.**

Together, premises 1,2, and 3 give us grounds to **conclude** that **one needs principles that integrate one's full context of knowledge.** This is **Premise 4**, and it simply applies the conclusion of diagram 3.5 —one needs principles that integrate one's knowledge within a domain— to the widest of domains. This is where philosophy comes in. Premise 5 reminds us that **philosophy contains principles that integrate all fields of knowledge.** In other words, it is through the widest integrations of our experience that we come to see how our knowledge from biology, physics, economics, psychology, logic, anthropology, history, chemistry, art, and literature all fits together. Philosophical principles concern human beings and reality in general, and thus apply to the subject matter of all these specific domains of knowledge. That is why they can integrate knowledge across these narrower domains and identify contradictions. This is true not only of substantive principles, such as the principle that man has free will, but of principles of method. An understanding of the absolutism of reason, for example, would resolve the contradiction in the scientist's mind between his approach to scientific issues and his approach to issues of

living in society.

When we have validated a philosophical abstraction, moreover, it gives us a gauge to test the validity of new ideas. Of course, unless the abstraction in question is a philosophical axiom, the fact that a new idea clashes with it does not necessarily invalidate the new idea, but it shows that one of the two must be mistaken in some respect. This is how Premises 3, 4 and 5 come together to imply **conclusion** of Diagram 4.3: **Man needs philosophy.**

Diagram 4.3: Context and Philosophy



Having stressed the importance of checking for consistency among our conclusions, we need to be clear about the limitations of this principle. Some philosophers have held that relationships of consistency and mutual support among our beliefs are sufficient to validate those beliefs as true, a viewpoint known as the coherence theory of truth or knowledge. This is *not* the Objectivist position. Knowledge is objective conceptual awareness of *reality*,

so its correspondence to the facts of reality is its *primary* characteristic. The first question we should ask about any idea or claim is: “What are the facts of reality to which it corresponds? Does it or does it not identify an objective fact?” The truth of our conclusions is determined by their relationship to our perceptual awareness of things in the world, as integrated by reason, not by their internal relationships to other items in the context of our knowledge. Internal consistency is simply not sufficient to validate knowledge. Even if one discovered no contradiction among one’s thoughts, it is not a guarantee that one has ascertained the truth: one might simply be blind to the facts, and universally, though consistently, wrong.

Nor is internal consistency *necessary* for validation. Truth is not a characteristic of one’s entire knowledge, but rather of one’s propositions and theories. If one discovers a contradiction in one’s thoughts, it shows that *some* thought must be false, not that all one’s thoughts are false. If one has reached a conclusion by valid reasoning, from a body of evidence sufficient to prove it true, then it represents genuine knowledge, even if it conflicts with some other conclusion (though of course the latter conclusion cannot also be true.) The knowledge of a given fact, if acquired by objective, rational means, cannot be held hostage to errors we may have made elsewhere in our thinking.

What is the point, then, of using principles, including philosophical principles, to make sure that our conclusions are consistent? The answer lies in the rationale for Premise 1 in the diagram (see diagram 3.5). Conceptual knowledge within a domain (including the full domain of our entire context of knowledge) must be made consistent because when we discover a contradiction among our conclusions, we know that at least one of them must be false. Because reason is fallible, it is rare that we know for sure, before investigating, which conclusion is at fault. Of course an idea that contradicts one of the axioms can be rejected right away. But most conclusions are based on integrative processes that are subject to many errors, as we discussed in Chapter 1 (see the discussion of diagram 1.5 in that chapter). This fallibility requires that we exercise objectivity by checking the evidence that supports a conclusion whenever we acquire reason to think that an error may have occurred. We normally have such a reason when we notice that that conclusion contradicts some other conclusion.

Consistency is thus an important diagnostic tool. It is not the primary means of validating our knowledge, but it is a useful *secondary* principle for checking one’s knowledge. This is especially true of complex knowledge and knowledge based on limited evidence. Consider how much of our knowledge is gained second-hand — from journalists, advocates, and historians, for instance. In cases where one can’t easily check the facts oneself, checking the coherence of a claim as it relates to one’s other knowledge is a useful way of weighing its validity. And it is especially important to check the coherence of one’s highest abstractions, as a way of finding errors that can creep in to those kind of ideas;

these ideas involve the longest chains of integration, and are thus especially vulnerable to error.

Now we have seen two distinct ways in which philosophy is a value. If you have found that you agree with this reasoning, you can now feel reassured that your choice to explore the logical structure of Objectivism is not a waste of your time. Indeed, contemplation of the vast empirical evidence that supports our conclusion may even convince you that you are engaged in a worthy endeavor of vital importance to your own life.

Art as a Value

Art²³ is widely thought of as indefinable, inherently subjective, and disconnected from any practical need or concern. Many modern thinkers say art is any form of expression, if one wants it to be. Traditional thinkers often connected art with the creation or expression of beauty, which they saw as an eternal, otherworldly verity, like Plato's forms. Ayn Rand rejected both these theories. In their place she offered a clearly defined conception of art, and argued that art was intimately connected with man's need to rely on reason in the service of his life in this world.²⁴

The intent of this section is not to survey the entire field of aesthetics. We are concerned with art as one of the spiritual values that the Objectivist ethics says we should seek in order to satisfy the needs of our rational capacity. But of course we must draw on aesthetics to identify the essential characteristics of art: that which explains its power and ubiquity. There are many other important issues in aesthetics with which we will not be concerned here: what beauty is, and what its role in art is, what the forms of art are, how to evaluate works of art, whether the popular conception of art is improperly broad or narrow, and so on.

What is art? A play, a painting, a novel, a song, a dance: what do these things all have in common? Each of them is a concrete, something we can perceive with our senses. Each of them is a man-made object, an expression of the artist's imagination, vision, and ideas. And each of them represents real or imaginary things, people, places, situations, and events.²⁵ (Of course, we are speaking of what might be called "high art," as opposed to artistic works of design, such as furniture or woven patterns.)

Ayn Rand held that a work of art embodies a viewpoint—a content or theme—about issues much broader than the specific concretes involved, issues such as man's nature and place in the world. This content is what the artwork represents at its deepest level, and it is what the artist is trying to convey in creating and shaping his material. Art thus "involves man's widest abstractions:" As examples of the issues that art is concerned with, Rand mentioned the following:

Is the universe intelligible to man, or unintelligible and unknowable? Can man find happiness on earth, or is he doomed to frustration and despair? Does man have the power of *choice*... or is he the helpless plaything of forces beyond his control, which determine his fate? Is man, by nature, to be valued as good, or to be despised as evil? These are *metaphysical* questions, but the answers determine the kind of *ethics* men will accept and practice...²⁶

She described the answers that an artist gives to these questions as “metaphysical value judgments,” and she characterized art accordingly as “the selective recreation of reality in accordance with the artist’s metaphysical value-judgments.”²⁷

What does it mean to “recreate” reality? In many cases, of course, art involves invented people, scenes, and events. But Rand’s term applies primarily to the abstract content of the artwork. The artist conveys a view of reality that is selective, a view of reality that highlights what the artist considers interesting, striking, important, essential, typical, or ideal. The artist represents the world, not as it is in every respect, as a journalist or historian would report it, but “as it might and ought to be.” Thus the artwork is a concrete embodiment of the artist’s philosophy, and the viewer or listener responds to it as such. If the philosophical ideas implicit in the work are congruent with our own, we tend to feel a sense of recognition and affirmation that we experience as profoundly meaningful. It is the portrayal of a world fundamentally re-envisioned that gives great art much of its power.

This power, according to Objectivism, reflects a need of man’s consciousness, a need that derives from man’s need for philosophy. The connection between these needs is laid out in Diagram 4.4.

Premise 1 reminds us that, as we showed earlier in the chapter, **man needs philosophy**. In this context, it is not philosophy’s epistemological but its moral role—its role in aiding the pursuit of purpose and self as cardinal values—that is essential. A philosophical understanding of the values that make for a full life, and of the principles we should follow to achieve such values (i.e., the virtues), is necessary if we are to choose our actions wisely. Philosophy, in other words, must guide our actions. But it can do so only if one experiences philosophical convictions not merely as ideas or notions but as facts. A person who sees a truck racing down a city street takes the presence of the truck and its power to harm him as facts, as immediate realities, and he automatically refrains from stepping into the street. But if a person is in the hazy transition between sleeping and waking, caught between a vivid dream and the emerging but still dim awareness of the quiet bedroom, he is not yet ready to act on any of

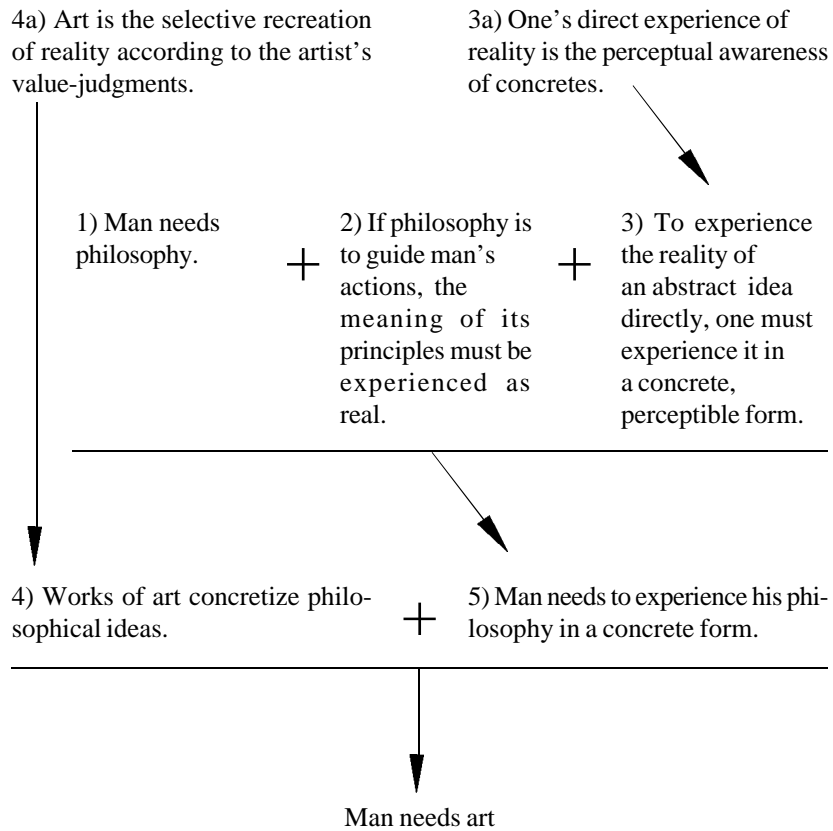
the confused contents of his awareness. In the same way, a person who grasps his own life as an ultimate value, who accepts the moral propriety of pursuing his own self-interest and understands that principle in the full context of his nature as a living being, is not likely to engage in self-sacrifice. But if he holds this moral principle as a vague or tentative hypothesis, a mere opinion as opposed to a fact, it will not have the same power to motivate. In other words, **if a philosophy is to guide man's actions, the meaning of its principles must be experienced as real.** This is **Premise 2** on the diagram.

But **one's fullest experience of reality is the perceptual awareness of concretes.** (**Premise 3a**) Our basic form of awareness is the sensory perception of concrete particulars. A philosophy is a system of abstract ideas. Abstractions as such do not exist out in the world. One does not encounter justice or injustice, for instance, except in the particulars which are instances of them, such as the proceedings in a court of law, or the character of a given individual. As abstractions, philosophical ideas embrace a wide range of particulars by omitting the details of their referents, while in perception we are aware of those details in all their complexity. By contrast with the wealth of information in a single visual scene, an abstraction can seem thin and unengaging. Of course we could in principle give a full conceptual description of anything we perceive. In the case of philosophy, we could in principle give an extensive conceptual description of what a good person would seek in life and the specific actions he would take to achieve it. But given the enormous number of issues involved, it would take volumes to do so, and the contents of those volumes could not be held in mind simultaneously. Because we have no richer or more direct awareness of the world, the experience of things via perception is what seems most real to us.

In the diagram, this inductive premise (3a) gives us grounds to infer **Premise 3: to fully experience the reality of an abstract idea, one must experience it in a concrete, perceptible form.** From the information summarized in premises 1,2 and 3, with the addition of the straightforward fact that a philosophy is an abstract idea, we can deductively infer **premise 5: Man needs to experience his philosophy in a concrete form.** As Ayn Rand expressed the argument,

An exhaustive philosophical treatise defining moral values, with a long list of virtues to be practiced, will not [communicate normative abstractions adequately]; it will not convey what an ideal man would be like and how he would act: no mind can deal with so immense a sum of abstractions.... There is no way to integrate such a sum without projecting an actual human figure—an integrated concretization that illuminates the theory and makes it intelligible.²⁸

Diagram 4.4: Art



Now we can see how art fits into human needs. Since the making of art involves the representation and embodiment of values, it is straightforward to conclude that **works of art concretize philosophical ideas**. This is **Premise 4**. In the most profound and distinctive art these ideas are, as Rand noted, fundamental judgments that capture important philosophical issues. In a novel, we can see these judgments in the essential nature of the characters, and the moral choices they make. A novelist in presenting a scene also performs in words the judgment that a painter or sculptor employs: in choosing to present a figure in a certain light, in choosing significant symbols, in highlighting some features and obscuring others, he communicates a sense of what is important, fascinating, worthy of regard. Even such stylized art forms as music and dance involve us-

ing the media of sound and motion to present an emotion-like sense of the world and of life.

Premises 4 and 5 together give us our **conclusion**: that **man needs art**.

Now let's consider what kind of direct, empirical evidence exists for our conclusion. We need to consider such evidence not only to confirm the conclusion but to complete the reasoning for it. The fact that we need to concretize our philosophical abstractions, together with the fact that art can perform this function, does not yet constitute a proof. There are, after all, other ways of concretizing ideas.

One can see ideas embodied in historical accounts, including biographies of great people. The stories of George Washington crossing the Delaware, and Winston Churchill during the Battle of Britain, are examples of courage that can inspire us in our own lives. Another way of concretizing ideas, one widely employed by religions, is ritual or ceremony. The act of burial, for examples, concretizes the fact that the deceased no longer exists in our world, and a gravestone serves as concrete reminder of a life that has passed.

What kind of inductive evidence is there that art is the best way, or at least an important way we can fulfill this need? We can introspect on the role of art in our own lives, and how much we feel we need it. Then there is anthropological evidence: art, and indeed all the traditional forms of art, including story-telling, poetry and song, music and dance, drawing and sculpture, exist in every human culture. And there is economic evidence, too: the amount of money people spend to acquire and experience art.

From this evidence, we can infer, given the conclusion of Diagram 4.4, that art is an extremely important value. Notice that we couldn't infer this without the argument in Diagram 4.4: the mere fact of art's ubiquity is not necessarily proof of its value. Mystical religions are ubiquitous as well, for example, and we would have to examine the nature of religion to understand why it is common (in fact, in its most useful aspects, it is a form of philosophy, and purports to make the world intelligible to people). But since we can show why art is needed, and observe that it is widely prized and produced, we have every grounds for esteeming it as a value.

Bear in mind that the argument in Diagram 4.4 does not summarize all the ways in which art is valuable. For instance, as the author Kay Nolte Smith pointed out, many forms of art give one the vicarious experience of living another life, in an aspect of existence such as a different time, place, career, sex, nationality, moral character, *etc.* This role of art can be very important in choosing one's purposes in life, by enlarging one's sense of human possibilities. Also, art that concretizes ideas one disagrees with can still be aesthetically pleasing; the experience of alien ideas as real can also give one insights into the way advocates of those ideas think of them. Art is also prized for aspects of design, including properties of elegance, symmetry and beauty. But art's great power

derives from its role as the concretizer of philosophy, and this is why we have focused on this aspect to the exclusion of other equally valid points.

Social Values

So far the values we have discussed are spiritual ones, which relate directly to the needs of reason. But of course we live in society and interact with others in the course of pursuing these values (as well as values in other categories). Objectivism is often inaccurately characterized as a philosophy of rugged individualism or ethical solipsism, partly because much of Rand's work, both fiction and nonfiction, was devoted to criticizing altruism as a moral doctrine. This critical aspect of Rand's writing lent it polemical power, especially in staking out room for individualism against the reflexive collectivism of her age. However, to reject altruism as a fundamental goal in ethics is not to deny the importance of society and social values, but rather to put them on their proper foundation. The purpose of this section is to show how Objectivism analyzes social values.

We pursue the values obtainable from others in myriad ways: going to the grocery store, taking a job, buying or selling a house, investing for retirement, playing cards, joining a health club, going to school, attending a concert, making friends, falling in love, raising a family, sharing the grief of a loved one's loss, contributing to charity, and on and on. Considered in the concrete, the values we seek through such activities are equally diverse, from the excitement of a new romance to the security of a retirement fund. In fundamental terms, however, Objectivism identifies three major values we can achieve through our social interactions. The first two of these are quite evident in the impersonal and public relationships we have with other members of society. These are *economic exchange* and *communication*. The third, which is more evident in the personal or intimate sphere, is *visibility*.²⁹ Note that these values are often pursued in combination rather than in isolation from each other. Certainly people who are intimate with each other, for example lovers, also engage in exchange and communication as part of their relationship, for instance. We distinguish these basic values for the sake of philosophical analysis.

Economic Exchange

Ayn Rand argued that, at the broadest level of abstraction, all proper human relationships amounted to some kind of trade.³⁰ Much of that "trading" is in fact implicit: here we are instead focusing on the explicit exchange of goods. Economic exchange is an integral part of everyday life. In modern life, as we saw when we discussed production, we get almost all our goods in the marketplace, and count our productivity in terms of money, which is of use only in exchange. We do our work as part of business firms, foundations, universi-

ties, bureaucracies, and other organizations based on the exchange and cooperation of labor.

The essential reason why economic exchange is a value is that specialization in the division of labor multiplies our productive capacity dramatically. Markets and firms are the means by which people institutionalize exchanges that the division of labor requires. This inductive point was well understood by such Enlightenment-era social philosophers as Bernard Mandeville and Adam Smith, and has provided the foundation for the modern field of economics.

Economic exchange serves the material value of production, fulfilling our material need for wealth. It also serves our spiritual needs, by allowing us to encourage the creation of works of art, for example, and by providing the arena in which we pursue our careers.

Communication

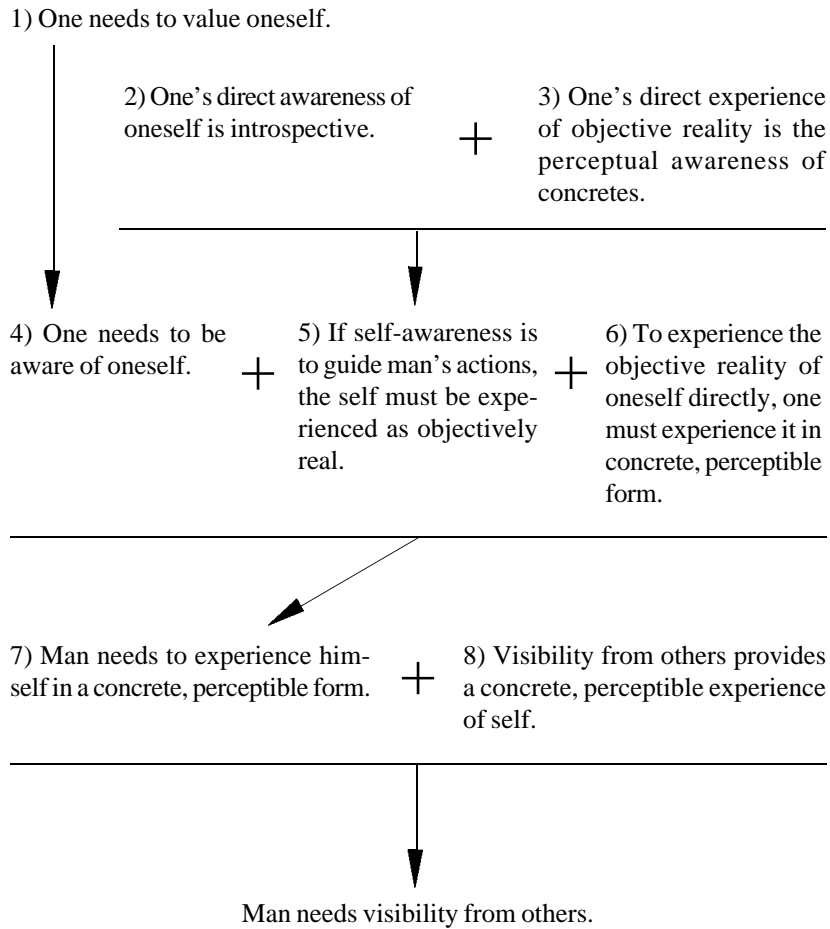
If we lived in isolation from each other, our knowledge and skills would be limited to what we could discover from the world and teach ourselves to do. Thanks to our ability to communicate, that is, to exchange ideas and knowledge with others, we are each able to partake of the fruits of the cognitive labors of generations. Communication is thus primarily a means to the value of knowledge, and because so much knowledge is available from others, as we saw in discussing education, communication is a very important value indeed. Communication also allows us to coordinate our activities explicitly, making possible complex productive activities and economic exchange. In addition, it is a vital ingredient of most other social values, such as friendship and love, for example.

The primary ingredient in such personal relationships as friendship and love, however, is visibility. While economic exchange and communication are obvious social values, and are widely recognized as such, the role of visibility in human life is much less obvious. Objectivism has a unique insight into why visibility is a value, and our main task in this section is to diagram the logic of its explanation.

Visibility

While exchange and communication are relatively impersonal ways of interacting, visibility is more personal and has deeper psychological roots. It is the essential characteristic that makes such personal values as friendship, love and companionship so powerful. The theory of visibility, outlined in Diagram 4.5, was primarily developed by Nathaniel Branden.³¹ In simple terms, visibility is the value of seeing oneself reflected in others. Let's see why this is a value.

Diagram 4.5: Visibility



Our starting points are some familiar observations. **Premise 1** expresses the cardinal value of Self: **One needs to value oneself**, a point we have already established.

In view of the plain fact that one cannot value something of which one is unaware, this premise implies that **one needs to be aware of oneself**. This is **Premise 4** in the diagram. Recall that valuing oneself means appreciating—and thus being aware of—one's full identity as a unique individual, including one's

particular personality, interests, style, character, convictions, and other attributes.

Self is a cardinal value because in order to act in support of our lives, over the whole course of our lives, we need to value ourselves as beneficiaries of those actions. A commitment to ourselves, and esteem for ourselves, is necessary to sustain the motivation for such actions and to enjoy the rewards. In regard to that enjoyment, as we noted, an appreciation of one's identity is a necessary condition for happiness. **If this self-awareness is to motivate action, however, one must experience his self as objectively real (Premise 5).** What does this mean, and why does it present us with a problem?

The problem arises because **one's direct awareness of oneself is introspective (Premise 2)** Of course, one's self includes one's whole person, body as well as mind. Objectivism does not subscribe to any dichotomy between the two. And we are aware of our bodies through interoception (see Chapter 1). In this section, however, we are concerned with the inner aspects of one's being from which one derives his deepest sense of personal identity. We are concerned with the self as "The thing that thinks and values and makes decisions," as Ayn Rand put it in *The Fountainhead*. And we are aware of these inner dimensions of our being only through introspection. **But one's fullest experience of objective reality is the perceptual awareness of concretes (Premise 3).**

Premise 3 also played a role in the demonstration that art is a value. Indeed, the logic of the need for visibility is exactly parallel to that of the need for art. Perception is the foundation of all other knowledge. As our only form of direct cognitive contact with the world, it is the touchstone and benchmark of our sense of reality. In the case of art, the argument turned on the contrast between the abstractness of one's philosophical convictions and the concreteness of perception. In the case of visibility, the argument turns on the contrast between the *introspective* access we have to our selves and the *external* focus of perception. In Chapter 1, when we discussed the axioms, we noted that in perception we are aware of things as existing, as having identities, as being what they are independently of our awareness of them. This is the source of our concept of objectivity, and perception gives us our fullest, most immediate, and most powerful experience of objectivity. Introspection, by contrast, is a mode of awareness internal to our consciousness. Even here, of course, the primacy of existence still applies: our thoughts, feelings, values, personality, character, etc., exist and are what they are. But our awareness of them lacks the full and immediate sense of objectivity that external perception provides.

By contrast with the solid presence of a chair, or of one's body as one sits in it, a thought or feeling can seem intangible, fleeting, not fully real. And the permanent aspects of the self such as personality and character are hard to discern accurately because they are parts of a background that pervades all one's thought and actions: there is no immediate contrast object. We can conclude that **to experience the objective reality of oneself more fully, one must expe-**

rience it in concrete, perceptible form (Premise 6). This intermediate conclusion follows from Premises 2 and 3. And because we do need to experience ourselves as objectively real (Premises 4 and 5), we can conclude that **man needs to experience himself in a concrete, perceptible form (Premise 7).**

That is what visibility does for us. That is why visibility is an important value. As **Premise 8** states, **visibility from others provides a concrete, perceptible experience of self.** This is an inductive conclusion, based on the abundant data we all have from our relationships with other people, along with the insights of psychologists.

The phenomenon of visibility works in two ways:

1) Other people embody values just as we do, so getting to know someone who embodies one's own values allows us to experience the traits we value in a perceptible form. For instance, one pleasurable aspect of interacting with one's siblings is experiencing mannerisms and often fundamental attitudes much like one's own. Similarly, getting to know people with whom one shares a concrete interest, such as painting or foreign cultures, allows one to experience, in an external form, the engagement with that subject we usually only feel from the inside. One need not even be intimate with someone to experience this kind of visibility: one may admire a stranger for his character traits, for instance, or identify with a figure from history.

2) The way people respond to us gives another form of visibility. When a person responds to one in conversation, for example, he is responding to the ideas and sentiments that one has expressed, as well as to the manner of the expression. One can "gauge" oneself by the way the other person reacts. This effect is especially powerful in intimate interactions, such as profound friendship or romantic love, because the respondent is then much more aware of one's whole self, by dint of experience. Also, one's own familiarity with and admiration for the respondent increases one's awareness of the meaning of the response. This is one aspect of what makes romantic relationships so powerful, but it operates in all sorts of relationships, to varying degrees, and one can get this kind of visibility for certain aspects of oneself, as an actor does when an audience applauds his show.

We can only determine by introspection whether these two types of visibility are actually an important part of what we get psychologically from social intercourse. A secondary source of information is psychological research. Given Premise 8, we are able to conclude Diagram 4.5 by a final inference from it and the previously established Premise 7. Since visibility is a means of gaining a concrete experience of oneself, and since one needs such an experience, we can infer that **man needs visibility from others.**

This conclusion is confirmed inductively by the felt need for relationships, by the loneliness and isolation one feels at the absence or loss of such relationships in one's life. As in the case of art, we need this inductive evidence

not only to confirm but to complete the deductive argument. After all, there are forms of visibility other than the kind we get from other people. One can look at oneself in the mirror. One can watch oneself on a videotape. Someone who is learning to perform in public, for example, can usually benefit from seeing a video recording of himself performing: it allows him to discern, as an external observer, mannerisms that he could not discriminate clearly on the introspective level. Indeed, the sense of strangeness that most people experience when they first see themselves on videotape is a graphic illustration of the difference between introspection and perception as modes of awareness of the self.

There are yet other forms of visibility. Most people take satisfaction in arranging and decorating their homes according to their taste, and take pleasure in seeing themselves reflected in their surroundings. And one component in the pride we take in viewing a project we have completed—a book manuscript, a successful meeting, a garden in bloom—is the awareness of it as an embodiment of our effort and creative vision. Nevertheless, none of these other forms of visibility can provide us with as full an awareness of our identities as can the interaction with people who can respond to the full range of our personalities and characters.

It's important to note that visibility is but one of the constellation of values one can gain from a social relationship. Any relationship gives one opportunities to gain values from economic exchange and communication, as well as visibility. In a typical family, for example, members offer each other financial assistance from time to time, and communicate ideas and lessons from life to each other (to say nothing of parents educating children), on top of providing other members with an enhanced awareness of their own identities.

Conclusion

Now we have achieved a better understanding of the cardinal values, and some important spiritual and social values. We have also surveyed, by example, the method by which Objectivism traces values back to the ultimate value of life. In other words, we have developed a clear sense of the “what” of ethics: what we should act for. Now we are ready for the “how.” That is the subject of the next chapter.

The values that we have identified in this chapter reflect universal human needs, and we have accordingly stated them in the abstract. As we noted in Chapter 2, when we discussed the connection between needs and values, each person has these needs in a specific individual form. People differ in the particular forms of art to which they can respond, for example, or in the relative importance in their lives of close romantic relationships. Within the abstract structure of values we have identified, each person must develop his personal hierarchy of values to seek in life and guide one's daily decisions. Our abstract

analysis will not dictate those personal commitments. But it does have three important functions:

- It grounds basic human values in the alternative of existence or non-existence, thus showing how they are objective.
- By connecting survival to values such as friendship and art, it begins to show how survival requires flourishing, or in other words, how achieving a “mere” life requires living a good life. We will flesh this out even more in coming chapters.
- It shows that these values are logically consistent, because they reflect a moral goal and a reality that are non-contradictory, and thus that a “state of non-contradictory joy,” i.e. happiness, is possible in life.

1 What Rand calls the cardinal value of Self-Esteem, we call the cardinal value of Self. The reasons for this will be made clear as we discuss the diagram. There is a common usage of “cardinal” that means “quantified,” and is usually contrasted in discussion of value with ordinal value. This is not the meaning of “cardinal” in this case. Rather, it refers to something that is of foremost importance.

2 “Galt’s Speech,” FNI 128

3 The relationship between valuation and a beneficiary can seem confusing if we ignore the life-supporting ethological character of value. It is true that, having free will, a person can “act to gain and/or keep” ends which are of no benefit to himself. This is what self-sacrifice amounts to. While it is true that such ends can be esteemed and acted for intentionally, as if they were values, in the Objectivist analysis this is a faulty application of the human capacity for acting purposefully, and a misapplication of concepts such as benefit, value, etc. Thus, we must distinguish from a person’s value-system, which may fail to be objective while implicitly accepting the choice to live, from an arbitrary assertion of purposes that are unconnected with life.

4 Induction and deduction are treated, as the reader will recall, in the Introduction.

5 Citation on anxieties needed. See Alan Waterman, *The Psychology of Individualism**?

6 [*Aging and active mind? Ask Ken L.]

7 Readings on religious wars include, e.g. C.V. Wedgwood *The Thirty Years War* (London: Pimlico, 1992 [1938]). See Simon Schama *Citizens, a Chronicle of the French Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1989) for an assessment of the role of irrationalism, especially elevation of sentiment over pru-

dence, in the coming of the Terror of 1793, and the imperialism that followed. For irrationalism in Nazism, see Leonard Peikoff *The Ominous Parallels* (New York: Meridian, 1993).

- 8 References on Enlightenment, Song Dynasty social conditions*
- 9 Rand, “The Objectivist Ethics,” 25. In his *Objectivism*, 298, Leonard Peikoff confines his discussion of purpose as a cardinal value to the context of product work as man’s central purpose. We address this approach in Chapter 5.
- 10 *Atlas Shrugged*. 94
- 11 David Schmidt “Choosing Ends” in *Ethics* 104 (January 1994) 226-251 considers how people choose broad goals intended to invest meaning into their lives and provide the basis for choosing among subsidiary values. Having the broad goal of choosing a career is one example he treats.
- 12 See also Viktor Frankl *Man’s Search for Meaning* (New York: Touchstone, 1984) for a discussion of a therapeutic approach centered on attributing meaning to life.
- 13 See e.g. Donald F. Klein and Paul M. Wender *Understanding Depression* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) New York: Oxford, 1994 119, 122. Note that it is well established that severe depression often has a biochemical basis that can be alleviated with proper medication, although therapy is still useful in many of these cases. Thus the fact that person is depressed cannot serve as *prima facie* evidence for any sort of moral shortcoming.
- 14 The wave of corporate reorganization in North America during the 1980s and 1990s has often involved the management of firms refocusing their activities on the basic purpose of maximizing value for shareholders. Business firms are unlike many organizations in having such a narrow ultimate goal.
- 15 *Cites on progress attitudes among Victorians, Asian Tigers: Horatio Alger, Gertrude Himmelfarb? On East Asia: Ezra Vogel e.g. *Japan as Number One* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985 [1979]) or *One Step Ahead in China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).
- 16 Of course, the ethics of self-sacrifice have gained prestige from the perceived success of groups that practice it, including conquerors such as the Romans, and religions such as Islam and Christianity. But it is certainly plausible to point out that these ancient societies tended to become rigid and stagnant, and often were prone to internal conflict, all conditions that tend to harm the lives of individual members of the society in question and lead, in time, to the downfall of its institutions as well. A similar process might be credited with bringing about the victory of the creative, individualistic West over the relatively stagnant, collectivistic Communist Bloc during the 20th- Century “cold war.”
- 17 See e.g. Nathaniel Branden, *Honoring the Self* (Los Angeles: T.P. Archer, 1983) New York: Bantam, 1985 71–79. Branden, a life-long Objectivist, is widely considered a pioneer in the field of self-esteem theory. See also his

The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem (New York: Bantam, 1994) for an overview of this approach to self-esteem. See also Bednar, R. and Peterson, S. *Self-esteem: The puzzle of low self-regard* (New York: Plenum, 1993).

- 18 Part of education must include the independent confirmation of the information one is learning. One may learn ideas directly from others, but one can only be sure of their truth or falsity when one has considered the evidence for them oneself, by experiment, for instance. This confirmation need not be excessively technical: one can test the gravitational constant of earth with a pair of balls, for example, and there is no harm in depending on reliable experts for information so long as one recognizes that such information comes at second-hand. We will address this issue in more detail in our discussion of the virtue of independence, in Chapter 5.
- 19 Of course, neither the hierarchy of knowledge nor the order in which one must acquire it are fixed in such a way that there is always and only one way of coming to a piece of knowledge. However, it is true that one can't understand certain abstract truths without the knowledge they presuppose. For instance, this discussion requires an understanding of what conceptual knowledge is: that is a constraint that cannot be avoided.
- 20 Ayn Rand, "Philosophy and Sense of life," in *The Romantic Manifesto* 2nd rev. ed. (New York: New American Library, 1975) 30.
- 21 See e.g. *ibid.* 34–44.
- 22 Rand, *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, 74.
- 23 In discussing art, we are addressing the essential aspects of what is commonly known as "high art." We neglect an important aspect of esthetics, the theory of beauty, which means also leaving out a discussion of design or decoration, which is the role much so-called "art" performs today.
- 24 Rand's essays on art are collected in Rand, *The Romantic Manifesto*. Peikoff's *OPAR*, Chapter 12, has an able summary of those essays. For a critical study of Rand's aesthetics, and its connections to other aesthetic theories, see Marder-Kamhi and Torres, *What Art Is*.
- 25 Music is the only major form of traditional art that is not obviously a recreation or representation. There are a variety of theories as to how music fits in: Rand supposed that music represented emotional or mood states, and many other thinkers have shared similar views.
- 26 Ayn Rand "The Psycho-Epistemology of Art," in *The Romantic Manifesto* 19.
- 27 Ayn Rand "Art and Cognition," *The Romantic Manifesto* 45.
- 28 "The Psycho-Epistemology of Art," 21
- 29 We do not claim that these three values represent an exhaustive analysis of social values. That would depend on an inductive examination of the range of concrete values, an analysis which, to our knowledge, has never been done in a systematic way in the Objectivist literature.

30 e.g. “The two great values to gained from social existence are: knowledge and trade.” Rand, “The Nature of Government,” in *The Virtue of Selfishness* 107

31 See e.g. Branden *The Psychology of Self-Esteem*, Chapter 11.

CHAPTER 5: VIRTUES

Ayn Rand distinguished between two categories in ethics: value and virtue. “Value is that which one acts to gain and keep,” she wrote, “‘virtue’ is the action by which one gains and keeps it.”¹ If wealth is a value, then producing it is a virtue. In other words, our values are *what* we should seek, and our virtues are *how* we should seek it. In Chapters 3 and 4 we established the Objectivist method of analyzing values, and justified, among others, the three cardinal values of human existence: Reason, Purpose and Self. Now we are ready to apply the same kind of analysis to the virtues of Objectivism.

When Rand characterized virtues as “actions,” she was making a point about the essential connection between virtues and values. Negatively, this emphasizes the fact that a mere desire, that one never enacts to attain some real, concrete end in the real, concrete world, cannot count as a virtue. She realized, however, that virtues are not simply physical actions, but involve a conscious commitment as well. A conscious commitment is a commitment to act on the basis of knowledge. This is why Rand describes each virtue as the recognition of certain facts. For example, in *Atlas Shrugged*, she writes: “Rationality is the recognition of the fact that existence exists, that nothing can alter the truth... Independence is the recognition that yours is the responsibility of judgment and nothing can help you escape it...”² Thus virtues are both existential and cognitive: **a virtue is a policy of acting on a principle that identifies a method of achieving values.**

Virtues and Character

Aristotle characterized virtues as *dispositions* to act, because having a virtue means acting consistently in a certain way.³ This is a good external description of virtue; from the outside, a virtuous person seems to be so as a matter of course. But from the inside, as Rand emphasized, holding a virtue is an ongoing process that requires effort. We don’t see the decisions that lie behind a principled, virtuous person’s actions; we only see the actions. But to be such a person, one must make those hidden decisions, develop that inner resolve. This is why in each diagram of this chapter, we denote the decision to practice a virtue as a *commitment* to acting on the basis of the recognition of certain facts.⁴

Virtues are also thought of as dispositions because of their relation to one’s moral character.⁵ One’s character is made up of the subconscious integrations and habits that shape how one tends to think and act. It shapes how one forms one’s intentions and chooses one’s actions, unless one exerts conscious effort to act differently. In other words, one is predisposed to act in accordance with one’s character. For instance, a person who habitually attends to the ways

in which others might deceive or harm him has a suspicious character. A person who habitually attends to the ways in which things might turn out well has a hopeful character. Facing the same situation, the suspicious person will tend to interpret it differently than will the hopeful person, unless each takes care to focus consciously on the facts and think through their implications. One's character most affects one's judgment and actions when one has little time to decide, or when one faces a complex situation that requires interpretation at many levels.

We will discuss how one incorporates new habits, and especially moral principles, into one's character shortly, when we discuss the virtue of integrity. At this point, the important fact to note, as a matter of introspective induction, is that one's character does include such habits. Therefore, one important question we should ask in discussing any particular virtue is: do we benefit by incorporating it into our characters? In other words, can it reliably guide us in normal situations when we must count on our subconscious assessments as much as on conscious considerations? As an aspect of one's character, a policy of acting must not only be useful for gaining values in one context, it must also be consonant with the successful pursuit of values in a wider context. For example, the policy of shooting first and asking questions later will certainly fend off the occasional mugger, but will make it hard to hold to down a job. It is not a policy that is conducive to life in its full context, and thus would not make a good character trait in normal social circumstances.

Rationality

Rationality is the fundamental virtue in Objectivism. In fact, all of the Objectivist virtues can be construed as aspects of living rationally. Rationality is the fundamental virtue because, as we saw in Chapter 3, reason is our primary means of survival, and because we exercise our free will resides essentially in the choice to direct our own minds. Ayn Rand expresses the primacy of rationality when she wrote: "Rationality is man's basic virtue, the source of all his other virtues. Man's basic vice, the source of all his evils, is the act of unfocusing his mind, the suspension of his consciousness, which is not blindness, but the refusal to see, not ignorance, but the refusal to know."⁶

Objectivism holds that the two basic choices one faces are the choice to think and the choice to live. In technical discussions of the foundations of the philosophy there is a debate, rather like the question of the chicken and the egg, about which of these choices is more fundamental. On the one hand, there are those who note that without choosing to focus our minds, we cannot know — nor act for — anything. On the other hand, there are those who point out that without choosing to live, we have no reason to focus on one thing rather than the other, nor any reason to act for this rather than that.

The question of which choice is more fundamental is complex and profound, but we can answer it briefly in this way: each is fundamental in a certain respect.⁷ Without choosing to live, it is impossible to have values. But without choosing to think, it is impossible to act to gain values. The choice to live is thus the leitmotif of objective value, while the choice to think characterizes the modus operandi of objective virtue.

Diagram 5.1 examines the reasons why we need a commitment to rationality as a consistent policy and character trait. Its premises are facts that we have already established during our discussions of reason in Chapters 1, 3, and 4. Indeed, given what we have already said about reason as man's primary means of survival, and as a cardinal value, it is a simple exercise to diagram the argument for rationality as a virtue. In fact, you may want to test your grasp of the diagramming method, and of the material we have already covered, by attempting to sketch out the argument on your own, before looking at Diagram 5.1. or reading ahead (Diagram 5.1 appears on the next page).

Premise 1 states that **acting to create or acquire values requires the use of conceptual knowledge**. This is another way of expressing the central point of the Objectivist ethics, the inductive basis of which we surveyed in Chapter 3. As we noted there, the main way in which we gain material values is via production, and conceptual knowledge is essential to the process of production on the human scale. We also saw that because of its unit-economy function, conceptual thought is to some degree necessary to almost all human actions. We don't have any other means of guiding our actions effectively, so we have to rely on what we know about the world in deciding how to act no matter how we go about getting values. Even cave men had to know about their prey, and even a robber has to know what to steal.

Premise 2 restates the conclusion of diagram 1.4: **all knowledge is acquired by reason**. That is why reason is our means of survival, because it is essential to our mode of getting values.

Premise 3 states that **reason is volitional**. This fact, which we experience axiomatically in our every act of awareness, is the reason that we need virtues in the first place. We need virtues because we have to make an effort to act for our own benefit.

These three premises give us sufficient reason to **conclude that one needs a commitment to grasping reality and acting accordingly**. In other words, one needs to cultivate the character trait—the virtue—of rationality. This includes upholding the cardinal value of reason, in the ways we discussed in Chapter 4. As an activity, reasoning works toward the two essential poles of reason that we discussed there; on the one hand in methods of ensuring objectivity; on the other via the integration of distinct particular things. Rationality has two corresponding aspects.

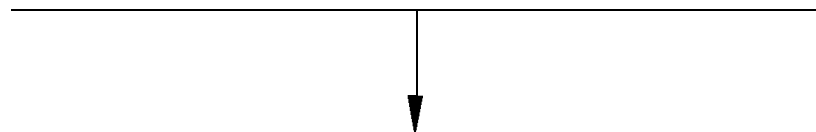
1) *Objectivity*: In Diagram 1.5 we observed that “Reason is objective

only to the extent that it is based on evidence and one has excluded non-objective factors from the integration.” So rationality is a commitment to objectivity, as against bias, emotionalism and evasion. This means holding reason as an absolute, as one’s sole ultimate source of judgment. It means being scrupulous in one’s attention to facts, and logically consistent in one’s inferences. It also means being willing to revise conclusions when the facts demand it, and welcoming the increase in understanding even when it seems to threaten one’s pre-conceived ideas.

2) *Integration*: As we saw in chapter 1, “Knowledge is acquired by the conceptual integration of perceptual data in accordance with logic.” So rationality is also a commitment to the active use of one’s mind, to integrating new facts into one’s store of conceptual knowledge. This means not only being open to new facts, but also being inquisitive and engaged with processes of knowing and learning more. It means actively pursuing the connections among one’s ideas.

Diagram 5.1: Rationality

1) Acting to create or acquire values requires the use of conceptual knowledge. + 2) All knowledge is acquired by reason. + 3) Reason is volitional.



One needs a commitment to grasping reality and acting accordingly.

Virtues and Rationality

“Grasping reality and acting accordingly” could generally characterize the use of reason to pursue any values, by any means. When one swims for exercise, for example, rational deliberation and choice lie behind the decision to do so, and oversee the stroke one swims with, the pace one swims at, how long one swims, and so on. When one kisses a loved one, one does so because at some level one has reason to think this a beneficial thing to do.

Since, in this sense, rationality is all-embracing, one might well won-

der why we need other virtues. We need them because they are more specific principles tailored to salient aspects of living rationally. They flesh out what it means, in the context of rational life, to act in accordance with one's grasp of important facts. The virtues arise from considering common problems or situations we normally encounter, such as the fact that we live in society (e.g. justice and independence), or our need to unify theory with practice, and the short-term with the long-term (integrity).

These applications of rationality aren't transparent or obvious. As we will see shortly when we discuss integrity, the virtues highlight the right kind of action to us when determining what to do —by means of inductive reasoning about each new case— would be impossibly time-consuming and difficult. We also need principles that identify requirements of using reason itself —such as honesty, for example— that are not obvious in the formulation of rationality itself. In a negative sense, the virtues also summarize how we should face common temptations to irrationality, such as laziness, dishonesty, and so on.

In general, when we consider a new principle of virtue, we will always ask: what facts of reality give rise to this principle? Are there needs that the virtue in question addresses distinctively? Each diagram identifies the values that give the principle in question normative force, and elaborates on the aspects of human nature and social interaction that the virtue recognizes. In this way we will connect each virtue to the survival needs of each us as -individual human beings.

In this chapter, and the next, we will apply this methodology to examining the other major virtues of Objectivism. We have divided the virtues into two groups primarily for ease of exposition. We tend to group virtues that call on similar argumentation or address similar aspects of life, and we give priority to virtues that address aspects of human nature that will prove important in later discussions. This is why the first virtues to which we turn are rationality, integrity and productiveness; the first addresses our basic cognitive mode of action, the second our need for a virtuous character, and the third our basic means of gaining values, especially the material values on which life most immediately depends.

More generally, the virtues we discuss in Chapter 5 are fundamentally pertinent to the needs of the individual as such, in that they serve us in achieving values independent of our degree of social interaction. Objectivism is distinctive among ethical systems for the emphasis it places on virtue as a need of the individual regardless of his degree of engagement with society. All Objectivist virtues are therefore most essentially concerned with practical means of advancing one's own life and happiness, not interaction with others. But whereas the virtues in Chapter 6 arise only in the context of society, the virtues we cover in this chapter would be beneficial even if one lived alone in a wilderness:

Virtues Discussed in Chapter 5:

- **Integrity** (Diagrams 5.2, 5.3, and 5.4) **is the commitment to acting in accordance with principles in pursuit of long-range values.** One should act in accordance with one's principles, standards and long-range values, in order to develop a healthy moral character.
- **Productiveness** (Diagrams 5.5 and 5.7) **is the commitment to taking responsibility for achieving one's values.** One should take responsibility for creating and prudently managing material values, especially by means of productive work, and for exerting one's own creative effort to achieve the fulfillment of one's spiritual, social, and political needs.
- **Honesty** (Diagrams 5.8 and 5.9) **is the commitment to grasping the truth and acting accordingly.** One should seek values by means of an objective grasp of facts, rather than by evasion or misrepresentation.
- **Pride** (Diagram 5.10) **is the commitment to taking credit and responsibility for acting on the basis of one's judgment in accordance with principles.** One should appreciate oneself objectively in order to achieve the profound sense of moral worth that is self-esteem.

We have noted that the virtues above are not primarily social in character. However, each of them does apply to interacting with others. Honesty, for instance, pertains primarily to one's own commitment to truth, but has a significant social dimension with regard to the use of deception to attempt to gain values from others; productiveness is connected to trade.

The virtues we will discuss in Chapter 6 are pertinent only in the context of dealing with other people. In that chapter we will discuss the core principles of the social ethics of Objectivism: independence, the ethic of the trader principle, and role of justice and benevolence in one's pursuit of social values. To establish the trader principle, we will also have to consider certain negative principles that pertain to it.

Virtues Discussed in Chapter 6:

- **Autonomy (Cognitive Independence)** (Diagram 6.1) **is the commitment to acting by one's independent judgment.** One should rely on one's own awareness of reality as the basis of one's knowledge, and not depend fundamentally on the judgments of others.
- **Justice** (Diagrams 6.2 and 6.3) **is the commitment to evaluating other people objectively and acting accordingly.** One should appraise others as potential sources of value, especially by means of evaluating their fundamental moral characters, and one should use this appraisal as the basis for seeking

values from others while avoiding or negating disvalues in society.

- **Non-Sacrifice** (Diagram 6.4) is the aspect of trade that **recognizes that one should not deliberately provide others with values without seeking values in exchange.**

- **Existential Independence** (Diagram 6.5) is the aspect of trade that **recognizes that one should not deliberately seek values from others without offering value in exchange.** In other words, one should not depend on other people to gratuitously provide one with material values, or other, less tangible values.

- **Non-coercion** (Diagram 6.6) is the aspect of trade that **recognizes that one should not initiate the use of physical force against others.** This respects the voluntary nature of trade.

- **The Trader Principle** (Diagram 6.7) **is the commitment to interacting with others only by trade.** One should neither sacrifice others to oneself, nor oneself to others, but deal with others voluntarily, exchanging value for value.

- **Benevolence** (Diagram 6.8) **is the commitment to treating other people as potential trading partners.** One should cultivate and respect others as independent human beings, especially by treating them with civility, sensitivity, and generosity.

This is not an exhaustive list of virtues.⁸ However, each of these virtues represents a commitment based on the facts of a major aspect of life. Taken together, they capture abstractly many important facets of life lived rationally. A principle of action merits inclusion as a major virtue not only because it is important, but also because it is pervasive and compatible with other virtues. Major virtues are pervasive in that they may be applied at any time, in any range of activities. For instance, the pursuit of any goal may be taken as an instance of responsibility (i.e. *productiveness*), while it is also an application of *rationality* to life, that demands *honest* contact with reality, a *proud* demeanor, personal *integrity*, and so on. And notice that these virtues are all compatible. One's honesty does not deprive one of productiveness, nor does one's integrity deprive one of pride. In fact, they are mutually reinforcing.

Some virtues apply primarily to an important area of life, but not to other areas. For instance, one's commitment to productive work is an important virtue, but does not apply to the cultivation of one's romantic relationships, though the broader principle of taking responsibility for the achievement of one's values does apply there. Productive work is one application of a broader virtue that we will be discussing. Moral judgment is another. There are also many minor virtues that we will not be discussing here. Minor virtues are instances of major virtues as they apply to narrower contexts. Courage, for instance, is an application of the major virtue of integrity, while civility is a com-

ponent of benevolence. Minor virtues lack the pervasiveness of the major virtues. One needs courage, for example, only in the face of fear, while many principles of civility only apply when dealing with relative strangers. We will not be treating such applications of the major virtues in any detail, except to acknowledge that they exist and are necessary to acting effectively in daily life. Nevertheless, as we discuss each major virtue, you may be able to better integrate it with your own experiences if you connect it to the more concrete policies of action you may already employ in your work, friendships, recreation, and so on.

Integrity

“Integrity” means wholeness or unity. A building or other structure has integrity, for instance, when its parts hold together. The Objectivist sense of integrity is based on Objectivism’s rejection of the mind-body dichotomy in metaphysics. Integrity refers to the inseparability of the spiritual and material aspects of man, and the unity of theory and practice.

Perhaps the best known example of integrity in action in Rand’s fiction is the scene in *The Fountainhead* in which Howard Roark decides to turn down the commission for the Manhattan Bank Building. What is striking about this scene is that Roark’s decision is based on what might seem a trivial issue: the board of the bank wants him to alter the building’s facade.⁹ Roark tries to explain to the board what is at stake: that to add an inessential feature to his design would undermine the building’s integrity and his own. But the board will not budge. In the scene, Roark grasps the significance of betraying his standards as if it were a physical blow, because his principles are so thoroughly incorporated into his character. Roark is the exemplar of integrity *par excellence* in that his actions always follow from his principles, and his principles are inseparable from his self.

Since integrity is the virtue of loyalty to one’s moral principles, it presents us with an apparent paradox like the paradox of purpose we discussed in Chapter 4. There, we noted the apparent circularity of a value of having values. Here, we are presented with a virtue of having virtues. As the virtue of being virtuous, integrity seems redundant. Each of the virtues is defined by a principle that specifies a manner of acting. Acting in accordance with those principles *is* acting virtuously. What more do we need? However, identifying the right principles of action and incorporating them into our manner of living is not a trivial task; rather, it is one that requires careful attention and effort. Integrity is the virtue of making that effort.

To see this in more precise terms, we will look at two related lines of reasoning that justify the virtue of integrity. The first (Diagram 5.2) arises from our epistemological need to think in principles, while the argument developed

in Diagrams 5.3 and 5.4 arises from our need for a healthy moral character. The two lines of reasoning are related because principles are essential to both long-range action and the development of a good character. This is why we characterize the virtue of integrity as **a commitment to acting in accordance with principles in pursuit of long-range values**. In both cases, as we will see, it is the importance of acting on principle for the sake of values over the full scope of life that makes integrity necessary.

Integrity and Principles

Our lives are long-term projects, and our most important values are long-term values that can support life over its full length, values like wealth, friendship, a career, and so on. But because the present is directly before us, and because perceptual experience is our most realistic and direct form of awareness, short-range goals and immediate pleasures can seem more salient and feel more tempting than long-term values do. Our daily lives present us with a multiplicity of decisions about what values to seek or forgo in the short-term, but we need to make those decisions with an eye to life as a whole, not merely what is right before us.

There are schools of philosophy, such as pragmatism and some variants of Utilitarianism, that make a principle of denying that we need to be principled. If one knows what one wants, they ask, then what else does one need in the way of instructions beyond: “Go on and get it”? In other words, once we know what is of value to us, should we not act to obtain it by whatever means seem practical at the moment? No two circumstances are ever exactly the same, after all, and, the world is complex. What use are clear ethical principles in this complicated world?¹⁰

In fact, as we have seen, acting on principle is a practical necessity in a complex world. We saw in Chapter 3 that to understand the natures of things, and to use that knowledge effectively, we need to think in principles. This fact applies to principles of action as much as it applies to descriptive principles such as those of science. There is no way we could evaluate every situation in which we must act as an idiosyncratic case, starting from a blank slate each time. The only alternative is to act on principle.

For example, when an engineer goes to build a bridge, he does not — and need not — puzzle out every scientific theory afresh and reinvent every possibility of design before starting construction. Instead, he draws upon his knowledge of similar situations. He probably has a stock of standard blueprints from similar projects to work on, and years of experience and training. He applies the methods and principles he has learned to the project before him. In just this way, our virtues are the methods and principles we need to use for handling the project of living.

To achieve values over the long term, we need abstract standards and principles of action in order to understand how what we do now will pay off in the end. The commitment to reason as an absolute guide means, in the context of a whole life, a commitment to principles as means of action. Diagram 5.2 spells out this epistemological rationale for integrity in detail. Let's take it step by step.

We begin with the *existential* basis of integrity: one's life is a whole that extends over time. This aspect of the argument begins with **Premise 1a**, which reminds us of the foundational principle of the Objectivist ethics: **for any living thing, its life is its ultimate value**. **Premise 1** elaborates on this fact by explaining that **values are ranked by their long-term significance for one's life as whole**. This is just a more complete way of saying that values are ranked by their significance for one's life, but it is an important point nevertheless. It means that the commitment to one's life as a value is a commitment to one's whole life, not just the next moment, day or week. One reason we need to act with integrity is to uphold the integral nature of our lives.

We noted in Chapter 3 that a conceptual mind formulates its knowledge about essential facts in the form of propositions. **Premise 2a** restates our characterization of principles from Diagram 3.5: **principles are abstractions that integrate conceptual knowledge within a given domain**. We might speak of the principles of Romantic literature, for instance, or the principles of aerobic exercise. As we saw in our discussion of the value of philosophy in Chapter 4, ethical principles are those general propositions concerning values and virtues that we can apply in the general run of life.

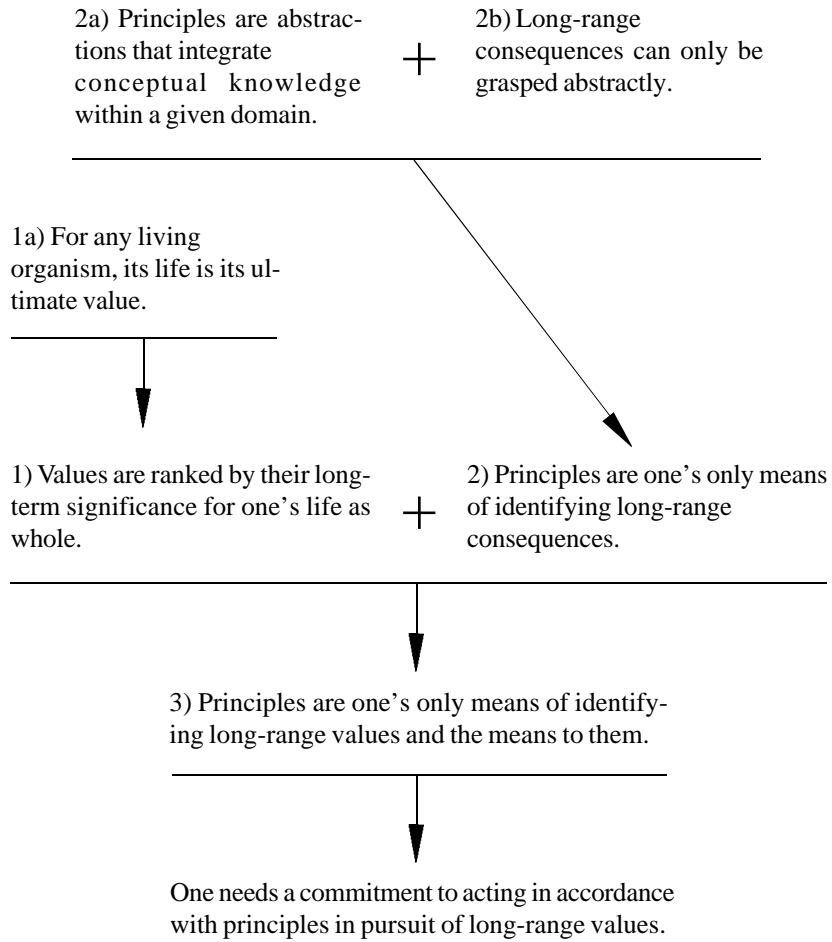
We can formulate all of our knowledge of values conceptually as principles, but of course we are also aware of short-term values through perception and feeling. For instance, when one is hungry, fresh food *smells* very attractive, and it feels delicious to eat. This is a case of perceptual awareness of a value. However, this kind of awareness never extends far beyond the current moment and is limited in other respects as well. We cannot grasp facts about the future, and its relation to the present, except through the use of conceptual knowledge. **Premise 2b** summarizes this inductively-derived point: **long-range consequences can only be grasped abstractly**.

From premises 2a and 2b we must conclude that **principles are one's only means of identifying long-range consequences**. This is **Premise 2**. As a logical inference, it does not require further confirmation, but on the other hand we should expect to find it amply confirmed in experience. And it is.

Diagram 5.2: Principles and Integrity

Inductive Evidence:

2b: Introspection, psychology, epistemology.



You can see how necessary principles are to long-range action by thinking of any choice that you must make for the long-term (it could be choosing a course of study, a new job, a lover, an exercise routine, a new appliance, a house, a retirement plan, or something less grand that had long-term significance). What kind of considerations would you have to employ? Say we are thinking through a change of career. We might prefer one kind to another (say active physical work over desk jobs): we distinguish one kind of job from another by applying an abstract distinction integrating many concrete differences. This job involves driving, walking, phone calls, etc., that job involves virtually no driving, many business trips, many phone calls; which is more “active” than the other? What if we concentrate on the income the new career might bring us? This is an instance of cause and effect, and as we have seen, we grasp causation conceptually, by means of principles. In this way you can observe your need for abstract principles in any choice you care to examine, as long as you take the full context of your life into account. But don’t take our word for it: work through a few examples on your own, until you are confident of this premise.

Notice how Premise 1 connects with Premise 2, relating the existential need for integrity to the *epistemological* need for principles: if values should be ranked by their long-term significance, then in order to rank them, one must understand their long-term consequences. Thus, the point of this argument is different from that of diagram 3.5. *There*, we established the need for principles as a form of knowledge. Here, we are establishing the need to *act* on the basis of that knowledge. With respect to action, the key point, which follows from premises 1 and 2 together, is that **principles are one’s only means of identifying long-range values and the means to them (Premise 3)**.

As we noted in Chapter 3, this is an insight that distinguishes Objectivism from most other philosophies. Traditionally, the principled man has been contrasted by philosophers and theologians with the practical man. By contrast, Objectivism holds that acting on principle is the only practical means of leading a successful life. It is our practical need to act on principle, identified in premise 3, that entails the **conclusion** of diagram 5.2: **one needs a commitment to acting in accordance with principles in pursuit of long-range values**.

Character and Integrity

Diagram 5.4 presents a related, but distinct line of argument for the virtue of integrity. This rationale derives from the need to develop and maintain one’s moral character. A moral character is conventionally described as a sum of one’s virtues and vices; but we associate it especially with integrity: a person of good character is one we can count on to act on his principles.

Moral character is a habit of acting, but not just any habit. Rather, it is concerned with morally significant actions and habits of thought. Moral charac-

ter is thus concerned with broad tendencies relevant to the universal principles of morality, and not the morally optional aspects of one's personality, such as the way one combs one's hair, one's diction, or what one prefers for lunch. (Our focus on moral character here should not be taken to imply that personality is unimportant. Indeed, as we noted in Chapter 4, our personalities are a key part of the distinctive, concrete content of our lives as healthy individuals). One's moral character is an automatic manner of grasping facts and valuing ends. However it is not a blind habit that can be detached from its cognitive content. It is the automation of one's moral code so that one acts in the right way as if by instinct, and one is more immediately conscious of the values at stake when one faces a decision.

In the Manhattan Bank Building scene of *The Fountainhead*, Roark feels the significance of the proposed compromise to his design as if it were a physical blow.¹¹ Of course, he understands the reasons for upholding the unity of his design, and in fact explains them at length to the officials of the company. But because he has integrated that understanding into his character, he understands its significance clearly and directly, not only consciously, but subconsciously as well. This enables him to act decisively in this difficult situation to uphold his long-term interests, despite the fact that his decision entails painful short-term costs, including the loss of all the work he has put into the design of the building, and having to abandon his career for an indefinite period of time.

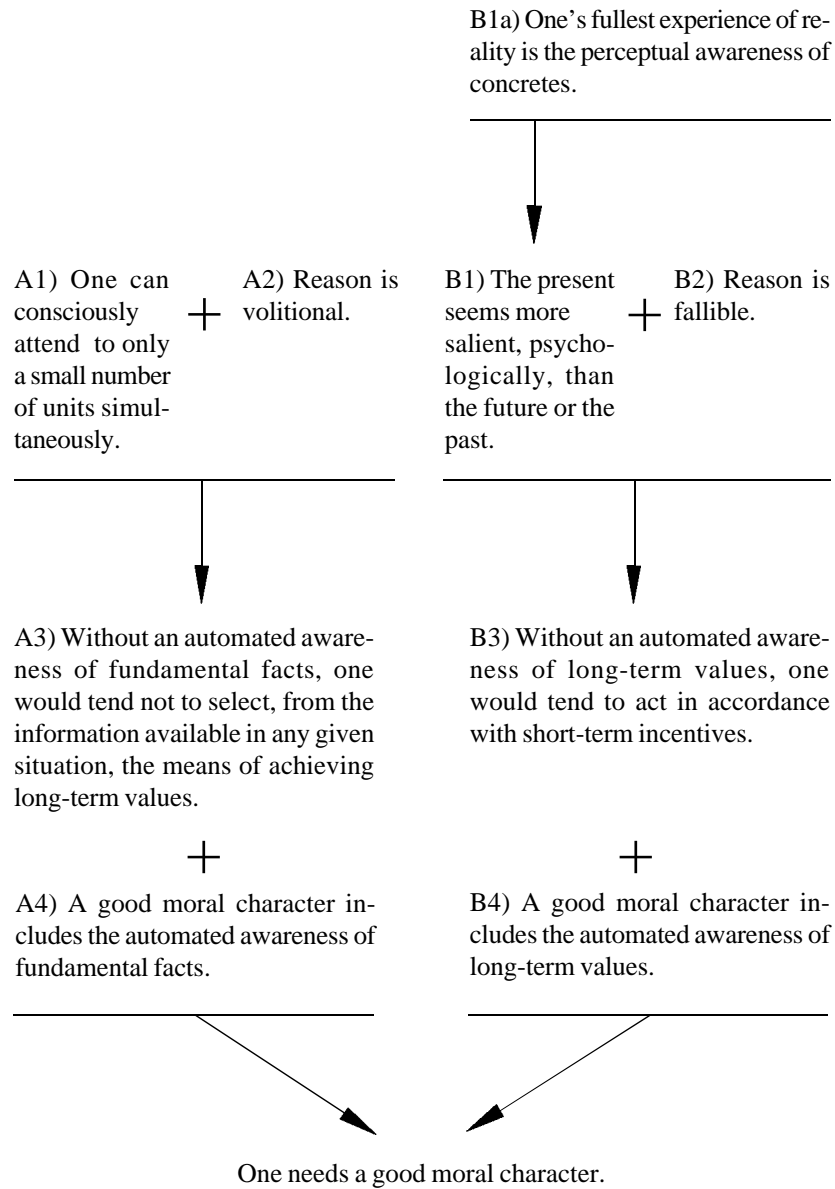
Diagram 5.3 presents two lines of argument that capture the reasons why we benefit from having a good moral character.

The first line of argument, "A," arises because we require subconscious guidance to be able to sort out the complexity that the world presents to us. **Premise A1** reprises a fact we noted in Diagram 3.4: **one can consciously attend to only a small number of units simultaneously**. Objectivists often refer to this fact as "the crow," a usage which derives from Ayn Rand's discussion of unit-economy in *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*.¹²

Premise A2 reminds us that **reason is volitional**. This means that when we look out on the world and decide what facts to attend to, our conscious choice is subject to our control and the product of our effort. Now imagine that one had no subconscious knowledge of important facts: how would one identify the facts that required the most attention? Imagine you are about to cross the street, one rainy day, in Chicago. Should you watch the traffic? Without the pre-existing knowledge that vehicles are dangerous, how would you know to do so? Should you avoid the rain? You would need knowledge that the rain was harmless. Are there peculiar properties to Chicago that you should be aware of? Only your experience with similar situations can establish for you that people cross the street in the rain quite normally everywhere. In short, **without an automated awareness of fundamental facts, one would tend not to select, from the information available in any given situation, the means of achiev**

Diagram 5.3: Character as a Value

Inductive evidence: A4, B4) Introspection, psychology



ing long-term values. This is **premise A3**, which follows from A1 and A2.¹³

To see how character fits into this analysis, we must first define our ~~term~~ *terms*: *a good moral character is the automated awareness of one's long-range values and of the basic means of achieving them.* We will see this definition again in diagram 5.4. It is an inductive generalization about human psychology, and as such the direct evidence for it is introspective.¹⁴ Each of us is aware of the basic orientation, habits, skills, and knowledge that we hold subconsciously. In our own lives, we can discern the effects of our characters in the basic cognitive tendencies we have. Which virtues do we practice consistently, and which seem like a strain? What values and consequences spring most easily to mind when we face a decision? How do we tend to react when pressed to make a decision? To what facts do we give the most weight? What we observe in this way are the operations of our own subconscious that make a good character possible.

Premise A4 expresses an aspect of character that we can discern through this kind of introspective attention above: **a good moral character includes the automated awareness of fundamental facts.** For example, consider the principle of the primacy of existence. A person who is aware of this fact at the depth of his character is reflexively disinclined to entertain ideas or wishes for their own sake, but looks for the practical application of his ideas and the realization of his aspirations in reality. Together, premises A3 and A4 allow us to **conclude that one needs a good moral character.**

The second line of argument, “B,” derives from our tendency to give too much weight to present events, and ignore our long-term values. It is true, as we have seen, that principles allow us to identify long-term values, but principles alone do not give the sense of the long-term as pressing and immediate. This is another positive function of character.

Recall that **one's fullest experience of reality is the perceptual awareness of concretes.** This familiar point is **Premise B1a.** In diagrams 4.4 and 4.5 we used it to establish our need for art and visibility, respectively. Here, we infer from it that **the present seems more salient, psychologically, than the future or the past (Premise B1).** Every time one is overwhelmed by the experience of the moment, by intense pleasure or pain, one is experiencing this fact. On a more mundane level, we all know that it is easy to be distracted by the present or absorbed in what is in front of one's face, while forgetting the past and neglecting the future. This is the fact immortalized in Aesop's fable of the thrifty, far-sighted ant, and the spendthrift, live-for-the-moment grasshopper.

We have seen in diagram 5.2 that we can reason about long-term consequences only by means of principles. However, as **Premise B2** reminds us, **reason is fallible.** This means, in particular, that it is easy to allow the immediate psychological salience of the present to affect one's judgment about which principles one should act on. Acting purely on conscious principle, with no

psychological mechanism to bolster one's will or to allow one to feel the importance of the past and future, would be difficult. In other words, we can infer from premises B1 and B2 that **without an automated awareness of long-term values, one would tend to act in accordance with short-term incentives.** This intermediate conclusion in **premise B3.**

Premise B4 states another inductive point about character: **a good moral character includes the automated awareness of long-term values.** (Notice that, along with premise A4, this fact is reflected in our definition of a good character.) It is a straightforward logical inference to **conclude** from premises B3 and B4 that **one needs a good moral character.**

In the Manhattan Bank Building scene, Ayn Rand illustrates both of our lines of argument. Faced with a difficult, complex decision, Roark's character automatically directs his focus to the fundamental facts before him, and to the long-term values at stake. In particular, he concentrates on the fact that his purpose in *being* an architect is to build buildings *his* way. Imagine Peter Keating in the same situation: a welter of other considerations would leap into his mind: how much the contract would pay, how influential the members of the bank's board are, how attractive the offer before him seems in contrast to the misty future, and so forth. Keating would sort them out on the spur of the moment, taking whichever path seems easiest and most popular. Roark does not make his decision without thinking, the way one unthinkingly directs a ball when one throws it. Rather, Roark automatically thinks in terms of his long-term principles: he doesn't have to strain to see why, given his goals in life, the integrity of his design must be paramount.

Of course, we should never rely on a fictional example as our sole confirming evidence. It is best to use it to highlight the kind of phenomena to which we should attend in our own experience. In everyday terms, the two aspects of a good character cash out in the following ways:

- **A) A good character makes a value of psychological inertia.** Imagine that you have developed the character of a libertine: you are always most aware of short-term pleasures. In order to work for long-range goals, consistent with your principles, you would have to constantly remain vigilant against your libertine tendencies, as if you were leaning into the wind. Imagine the difference if one's can make this psychological inertia work in one's favor! One's character is thus an aid not only to a decision one must make in a short amount of time, but in the pattern of thinking we employ in considering a crucial choice over months or even years, because it makes it easier to attend to the most important and fundamental facts in the case, as against irrelevant details.
- **B) A good character allows one to make long-range commitments.** In choosing a long-term course of action, we must count on ourselves to carry through in the future, much as we might count on another person. For instance,

we shouldn't make promises we can't keep, and, conversely, we need to render ourselves more capable of keeping the promises we do make. This is not a trivial task, because there are always short-term considerations and distractions that threaten our promises and commitments. Of course, no commitment is a duty, but on the other hand it is a mistake to sacrifice one's overall benefit to a short-term incentive. A good character involves the awareness of one's long-term goals and key commitments, and so a good character is a powerful aid for holding to commitments and achieving values over the long term.

So far, we have discussed a good character as something that one either does or does not have. In fact, the virtue of integrity is our means of creating such a character. Because one's character involves subconscious integrations, we can no more take it for granted that our characters are trustworthy than we can count on the soundness of unexamined emotions. Thus the key to forming a good character is to form it from principles that we have established by means of reason.

Diagram 5.4 lays out the rationale for integrity as the means of establishing and maintaining a good moral character. **Premise 1** integrates the facts summarized in premises A4 and B4 of Diagram 5.3 to define a proper moral character: **a good character is the automated awareness of one's long-range values and of the basic means of achieving them.** As we have just seen, premise 1 is an inductive generalization from psychology, for which our most direct evidence is introspective. It integrates the facts stated in premises A4 and B4 of Diagram 5.3.

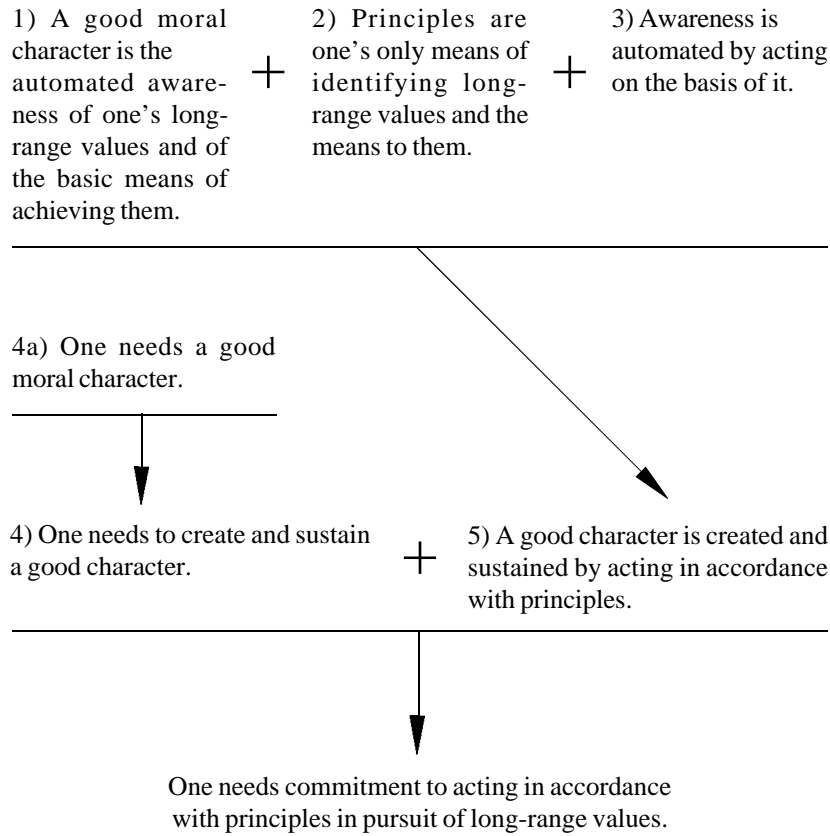
Premise 2 reminds us of the important epistemological point we employed in Diagram 5.2: **principles are one's only means of identifying long-range values and the means to them.** If one is going to develop an automated awareness of fundamental facts and long-range values (that is, a good character) one will have to employ principles to know what facts are fundamental, and what one's long-range values are. In effect, what a good character automates is one's understanding-via-principles and a disposition to act on the basis of them. In this way, a good character incorporates not only one's grasp of values, but also one's commitment to virtues.

But how does one go about automating one's awareness? This is the issue addressed by **Premise 3: awareness is automated by acting on the basis of it.** This is a psychological claim about how we form subconscious habits. Everyone has had the experience of automating a physical skill, such as throwing a ball or typing on a keyboard, by practicing doing it. Premise 3 states that, in effect, one can do something similar with mental habits.

Diagram 5.4: Character and Integrity

Inductive Evidence:

1, 3: *Introspection, psychology*



Once again, the most direct evidence of this will be introspective, and one should recognize the ways in which developing one's character is *not* like learning a physical skill. A habit of awareness is a habit of entertaining certain considerations, bringing an automatic context to bear on the situations one encounters. One cannot set aside ten minutes a day for practice and find that sufficient; indeed, with many aspects of character, one cannot practice them at all

except in their proper context. For example, one can only practice sensitivity while dealing with other people; to practice productiveness one needs to do work. This means that to develop one's character, one must be attentive to one's habits and strive to correct or improve them, if necessary, even when one has other demands on one's attention.

The foregoing leads us to conclude that one automates one's principled understanding of long-range consequences and fundamental facts by practicing thinking in terms of one's principles, and acting on them. This is the intermediate conclusion expressed in **Premise 5: a good character is created and sustained by acting in accordance with principles**. So for instance, the way one develops an honest character is by practicing honesty until it becomes "second nature."

So far in the diagram we have established how one goes about forming a character. **Premise 4a** adds the necessary normative element, reminding us of the conclusion of Diagram 5.3: **one needs a good moral character**.

Premise 4 follows directly from our need for a good character. It emphasizes the fact that forming a moral character is an active process: **one needs to create and sustain a good character**.

We are now ready to conclude the argument linking integrity and the need for a good character. Premise 4 establishes our need to form a character, and Premise 5 establishes that we do so by acting on principle. Together, they entail a need for a moral commitment to integrity. This is the **conclusion** of Diagram 5.4: **one needs a commitment to acting in accordance with principles in pursuit of long-range values**.

So we can see that the virtue of integrity, far from being redundant, is a commitment that is critical to successfully achieving the long-range values one needs over the whole of one's life. One way in which it does this is by enabling one to form the good moral character one needs to forge through the complex vicissitudes and temptations of daily life confidently and effectively. Of course, acting with integrity does not mean *denying* oneself short-term values and pleasures unconditionally, but rather being committed to seeking short-term values and pleasures in the context of one's overall life, goals and values.

With this understanding of integrity in hand, we will be able to examine the other virtues in terms of the roles they might play in our characters. In particular, we have to remain aware that any proposed policy of action, if pursued consistently, will tend to become incorporated into one's character. This means one must be able to count on it in the full context of normal life, and not merely in outlandish or emergency situations. We also have to be aware that developing a character of a certain type may reduce one's ability to engage in other kinds of action. A person of honest character, for instance, may struggle to lie glibly; a person of a mooching character will find it hard to do productive work. This has a significant implication for how we should judge our virtues;

namely, that is possible to pursue the best long-term course of action, and yet find oneself ill-equipped to cope when an unusual or unforeseen eventuality arises.

Even though a good character can occasionally result in unfortunate constraints on one's action in unlikely circumstances, this danger is insignificant in comparison with the harm that self-destructive character traits tend to cause on a daily basis. One's character is profoundly necessary to one's success in life.¹⁵ The Objectivist ethics is sometimes criticized as a morality of pragmatic calculation and expediency, but in this case the critics fail to appreciate the essential practical role of moral character, and of integrity more generally, in the substance and method of the philosophy.

Productiveness

We saw in Chapter 3 that the efficacy of reason in material production allows us to logically designate reason as “man's primary means of survival.” Without its productive aspect, reason would not deserve the all-encompassing place it holds in the Objectivist ethics. Aristotle, for instance, prized reason for its spiritual qualities, not its material powers, and this led him to exalt a moral ideal of contemplation that could only be pursued by scholars and the wealthy. This reflects a tendency to cultivate the spiritual character of reason, which naturally arises from the fact that one experiences reason as internal, i.e., as it were, purely mental. To militate against this tendency, we need a commitment to actively apply our reason in the material world.

The virtue of **productiveness is a commitment to taking responsibility for achieving one's values**. Its core is a commitment to production, which is the creation of material values, or values in material form. There is thus a narrow sense of productiveness as a commitment to taking responsibility for achieving one's material values by productive work. With this commitment to productive work at its center, Productiveness in its fullest sense is the cardinal virtue corresponding to the cardinal value of purpose. It is a recognition that one's needs, and the values that serve them, are of primary concern only to oneself, and that therefore the responsibility of bringing about one's values falls to one's own initiative and effort. Productiveness is thus the hallmark of a person who aims at achievement in life.¹⁶

In this section we will relate productiveness as a commitment to the creation of material values (diagram 5.5), to its more general sense as a commitment to achievement and responsibility (diagram 5.7).¹⁷ A career of work is often only possible as a full-time occupation because we engage in economic exchange with others. So we will see that part of our understanding of productiveness (and personal responsibility more generally) will have to wait until Chapter 6, where we establish the principle of trade as the basis of social inter-

action.

This analysis deviates from Ayn Rand's own writings to perhaps a greater degree than any other section of this book. Rand's presentations of productiveness summarize it as the implementation, in action, of the cardinal value of purpose, in terms that appear to equate purposive action with productive work. Sometimes, Rand argued that "productive work is the...central values that integrates and determines the hierarchy of all [man's] other values."¹⁸ We criticize this position in diagram 5.6, and do not grant productive work an imperium over all pursuits. We mentioned in Chapter 4 that purpose entails a commitment to acting to achieve one's values, rather than waiting passively for them to appear. Diagram 5.7 fleshes out this commitment as the cardinal virtue of productiveness. Similarly, in diagram 5.5 we show the reasons for regarding productive work as a priority. So we not dispute the basic fact that underlies the "central value" argument—namely: that productive work is often both the means of realizing important personal purposes, and the means to the material values without which one cannot survive. Our differences with Rand's writings therefore arise partly over what interpretation to give to that fact, and partly because this book presents the logical structure of the philosophy with a greater care for technical subtleties in the order of justification than have previous presentations.

As we've noted, Ayn Rand's discussions of productiveness link it closely to the pursuit of a career of productive work. Rand considered productive work to be a spiritual activity worthy of reverence, because through production, one makes real the ideas of one's mind; in effect, one gives one's soul expression on earth. This is most obviously true to the creation of art, which concretizes the artist's ideas and vision, making them seem real. Less obviously, this characterization also applies to any work that is truly the product of one's own thought and effort. As Rand put it: "All work is creative work if done by a thinking mind..."

This view of work as a noble activity implied an expansive vision of the role of productive work in man's life:

"...Productive work is the process by which man's consciousness controls his existence, a constant process of acquiring knowledge and shaping matter to fit one's purpose, of translating an idea into physical form, of remaking the earth in the image of one's values."¹⁹

However, productive work is not synonymous with the mere creation of values. When one develops a friendship for example, one may expend effort to create a value that did not exist before. Thus, when we say "you have to work at friendship," we mean that it requires the expenditure of effort. In the popular

mind, work and effort are often synonymous, so that “leisure” is contrasted from “work” solely those terms. But recreation is a means of achieving values that did not exist before—relaxation, rest, pleasure, etc.— and may be quite serious or even strenuous — e.g. when one plays a sport, a takes a long journey. If degree of exertion is not the difference, how do we distinguish between work and other aspects of life, such as recreation and friendship?

We distinguish productive work from other value-seeking activities in terms of the ends to which it is directed, not the effort that it requires. Productive work is a focused process of creating values, especially material values, for consumption and trade. In Chapter 3, we saw that there is a basic connection between productive work and the fulfillment of material needs like food, shelter, clothing, and health. We need production precisely because it is our means of fulfilling these needs. In a division of labor society, this core sense of production is expanded to include any activity that gives one wealth and the ability to fulfill one’s material needs by trade. In the modern “information economy,” for example, one can pursue an entire career devoted to the creation of spiritual values such as art or knowledge. This is possible because one can gain the material values that one needs, and the material means one’s other values require, through trade.

Diagram 5.5 presents the argument for the core meaning of productiveness as a commitment to taking responsibility for achieving one’s material values by means of productive work. As the diagram shows, this is an important commitment in our lives because of the logical primacy of our material needs, and the fact that production is our only reliable means of fulfilling those needs.

The diagram begins with a pair of familiar observations. **Premise 1** reminds us of the foundation of the Objectivist ethics: **for any living organism, its life is its ultimate value**. At this stage in the logical structure, we would normally employ a more derivative normative premise, such as one of the cardinal values, that better captures the aspect of life to which the virtue in question applies. Here we state the ultimate normative premise of the ethics explicitly, because the fundamental nature of a living being is the relevant fact for our argument.

Premise 2 states the basic fact about life that productive work addresses: **life is impossible without material values**. This summarizes two key points about material values, both of which we touched on in Chapter 3:

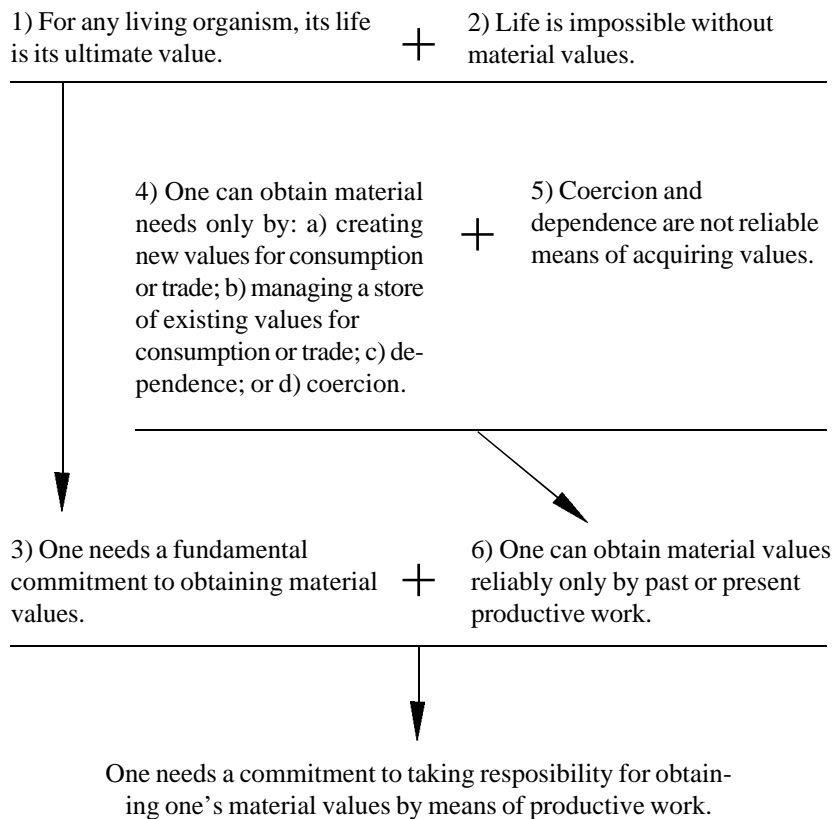
A) Material values are the most fundamental of our values in terms of logical order, because the short-run requirements of survival, such as air, shelter, medicine, and food are material. One can survive for a time, after a fashion, without art, without conscious thought (as when we sleep), without social contact, without just government. But one cannot survive without air, water and food. We identify our other needs — spiritual, social, and political— by the way in which, in the final analysis, they maintain our lives materially. It is hard

to survive for any length of time without knowledge, for example, precisely because we need knowledge of our material needs and how to fulfill them. Another way of looking at the fact expressed in premise 2 is to note that without material values, no other values are possible.

Diagram 5.5: Productiveness and Material Values

Inductive Evidence:

- 2) *Biology, medicine, 4) Anthropology, Economics*
- 3) *Conclusion developed in Chapter 6*



B) Many values that fulfill a spiritual or social need take a material form. Communication occurs through such media as telephones and books. Art is presented in material forms such as sculpture and film. Government requires courtrooms and congresses. Even romance requires a dance floor or a sunny meadow. So there is a “feedback loop” between non-material values and their material means. When we identify a new non-material value, we also implicitly identify its material means as values.

These two implicit aspects of premise 2 show why wealth, which is a sum of claims on material goods, is such an important value. Wealth can be used to acquire the means to fulfillment of material needs directly, and it can also provide the material means to important non-material pursuits. As the saying goes, money can’t buy love; but it *can* buy dinner, roses, and a weekend in Paris.

We can conclude from premises 1 and 2 that fulfilling one’s material needs and providing material means to other values is a basic priority in life. This is the intermediate conclusion expressed in **Premise 3: One needs a fundamental commitment to achieving material values.** A fundamental commitment is a commitment to take care of something first. Of course, it is artificial to separate the material from the non-material in daily life; we are unified beings of mind and body. Premise 3 is simply the recognition of the bottom line, and the importance of material values for all our other purposes. It does not imply that one should take sole or complete responsibility for meeting one’s material needs. (That broader concept of responsibility demands a rich inductive base for its support, one we will provide in Chapter 6.) Nor does premise 3 imply that one should always pursue material values at the expense of values of other kinds. As we have noted, pursuing values of other kinds will entail pursuing material values.

Premise 4 summarizes the various means by which one can gain material values: **one can only meet material needs by a) creating new values for consumption or trade, b) managing a store of existing values for consumption or trade, c) dependence or d) coercion.** This is an inductive claim, a taxonomy of means of gaining material values. In Chapter 3 we summarized a simpler taxonomy. There, we noted that one can only acquire values by means of making or taking. Premise 4 takes this analysis further, distinguishing two types of “making” and two types of “taking.” Let’s consider each of these in turn.

Part (a) of premise 4 concerns the creation of new values. This is the core meaning of “production.” The primary way in which most people come by material values is by trading for them with the values they have created by productive work. As Ayn Rand observed, one really does *make* money. Only the productive work of the vast majority makes it possible for so many people to

live at the high levels of wealth and health that are now commonplace in the industrialized world.

Over the course of a normal life one produces more than one needs when one is young, so that one has savings to live off of when one is old.²⁰ To do this successfully requires the employment of a different form of productive activity from the creation of new values: the prudent management of a store of value. This is the meaning of **part (b)** of premise 4. To benefit over the long term from any large store of value, whether one initially created it by saving, or received it as a gift or a legacy, one must manage it prudently, just as one would manage one's savings.²¹ To maintain a store of value such as one's retirement fund is as much an application of reason to the creation of value as other kinds of productive work: it requires long-term planning, choices among alternative means of managing, and so on. So both part (a) and part (b) of premise 4 state forms of living by means of productive work.

A gift, prudently employed, can serve as a source of long-term values. But one can also use a gift for its present value — indeed, this is the proper employment of the sort of small gifts one receives in such contexts as birthday celebrations. **Part (c)** of premise 4 expresses the fact that one can gain some material values by *dependence* on the voluntary generosity of others. There are panhandlers, for instance, who get by on mooched pocket change, at least over the short term, and there are occasional heirs whose vast wealth allows them to live in a profligate manner for many years. We will discuss the impracticality of depending on unearned gifts as one's source of livelihood when we discuss the trader principle in Chapter 6. For the purpose of premise 4, which is to make a taxonomy of the ways in which one could gain material values, it is sufficient to note that one *can* do so in this manner, if only sometimes.

Perhaps the most common form of dependency in American life is dependence on government handouts or subsidies. Such handouts, and the agencies that distribute them, are abundant in contemporary life. The government is able to extend such largesse because it enforces the taxation of the public to pay for it, and thus is able to skim off a share of the wealth that its citizens create by production and trade. This is an instance of *coercion*, which is **part (d)** of premise 4. Coercion is the employment of force to make others behave as one wishes. Where dependence relies on persuasion or empathy to induce others to voluntarily give up values, coercion extorts their assistance with a threat. Other common forms of coercion include theft, extortion and fraud. All of these can, at some times, for some people, be sources of material value over the short-term.

Premise 4 summarizes a broad induction from the facts of economic life. The four parts of premise 4 are meant to be *exhaustive*: methods (a) through (d) are stated to be the *only* means of gaining material values. To consider whether this is so, you should consult your own experience, as well as studies of social organization from anthropology and other social science fields. One method

that premise 4 does not include is gathering values directly from nature, as when one breaths the air or plucks a berry from a bush. But this is not a very significant source of values, as we noted in Chapter 3.

Aside from such values taken directly from nature, the only way values can exist is if someone produces them. In the first place, values must be created where nature does not provide them. That is item (a). For use over the long term, values must be stored and managed a prudent, productive manner. That is item (b). The effort expended in both (a) and (b) are aspects of productive work. Aside from engaging in production and trade, one can also at times obtain values as gifts. That is item (c). The only other way to gain values is by force, such as by theft. That is item (d). So Premise 4 seems to be accurate. But like any broad induction, it rests on a body of evidence that we can only summarize in cursory fashion at this level of abstraction.

Premise 5 states that **dependence and coercion are not reliable means of acquiring values**. This means that these are not means of supporting oneself over the long term —although it is undeniable that at times people acquire particular material values this way.

Ayn Rand rightly held that production is the human mode of achieving values and surviving, for reasons we summarized in Chapter 3. Is this point sufficient to exclude other modes of acquiring values from the proper life of man, and thus establish Premise 5? The trouble is that the claim “production is the primary human mode of survival” can be understood in several ways, and jumping from the sense in which we have established it to the sense in which it could support Premise 5 involves a subtle equivocation. In other words, we cannot use it, without further analysis, as evidence sufficient to fully establish Premise 5.

To see why, let’s look at three ways in which the claim “production is the human mode of survival” can be interpreted:

Survival of Crusoe: A person on his own, a Robinson Crusoe, must survive by production. One needs clothing, healthy food, shelter and other material values to procure even a medium-term survival. These are not available from nature; they must be produced.

Survival of Man: The human species and its civilization could not exist without the productive efforts of the vast majority of people. Production is essential to the success of human life in general, whereas mooching and looting are not, because they are parasitical on production.

Survival of Each Individual: For every person in the normal context of life, production and trade are always the practical and proper means of obtaining values, while dependency and coercion never are. Production is not merely proper for the vast majority, but for everyone.

From the facts about production that we have already considered, it is evident that the “Survival of Crusoe” (1) and “Survival of Man (2) interpreta-

tions are true. It is only (3), “Survival of Each Individual,” that we have yet to address.

To see why we have an incomplete answer to (3) at this point, consider the claim that for *some* wily, tough, or lucky people—even a small minority—coercion and dependency can be long-term sources of value. A corrupt third-world President with a fat Swiss bank account, or a lucky beach bum who can sponge off a wealthy cousin, have good “jobs” on this view—though such positions are hard to get. Certainly, such people exist, and if they don’t make up a large proportion of the world population, on the other hand the large world population means that even in small proportions there are quite a few of them. And then, folk wisdom extols the joys of life on “easy street,” the thrill of “getting away with it.” Common sense isn’t always right, but to deny it, we have to show why it is wrong. We have to be able to show that this is a mistaken hypothesis, that these are not “jobs” one should try to obtain, if we are to be able to provide convincing evidence that applies to each and every individual, in the normal context of life.

But we cannot provide that full argument at this stage in our discussion. This is because dependency and coercion are modes of gaining values in a *social context*. To evaluate them in their proper context, we will need a thorough account of the costs and benefits of the various possible modes of social interaction. This will allow us to see that coercion and dependency are *not*, in fact, jobs. They are not productive professions, like being a philosopher, a secretary, or an engineer. They represent a categorically different manner of dealing with people, one that disregards others’ natures as independent, rational beings. Analyzing this difference is a task to which we will turn in Chapter 6, when we explore the *trader principle*. It is only in that context that we will be able to grasp the full implications of character traits based on these policies of action.

However, given the facts that are summarized by (1) and (2), we can already see that Premise 5 is probably true for the vast majority of people. Even our “devil’s advocate,” who longs to be a St. Francis of Assisi—and live off of alms—or a Genghis Khan—and live off of loot—, would have to acknowledge that those modes of life depend on the productive effort of the vast majority.²² Even popular common-sense tends to realize that “crime does not pay.” So regardless of whether a small *minority* of people might make a living as parasites, the fact remains that for most people, production, in the sense of creating and prudently managing material values, is the only means available for sustaining their lives over the long term.

Together, premises 4 and 5 give us the following intermediate conclusion, expressed as **Premise 6: one can only obtain material values reliably by past or present production**. Production is here taken to include both the creation and management of material values, that is, parts (a) and (b) of premise

4 above.

Together, premises 3 and 6 entail the conclusion of our diagram: **one needs a commitment to taking responsibility for achieving one's material values by productive work.** This commitment to productive work is the core of the virtue of productiveness.

In the Objectivist view, productive work is an exalted moral calling, because in a value-oriented ethic there can be nothing more profoundly vital than the direct application of one's capacities to the creation of the values one most directly needs. In addition, one effect of the division of labor is that we can choose work that best suits our individual personalities and proclivities. Notice that Rand's working heroes, such as Roark, Dagny Taggart, or Hank Rearden, love the work they do not only because it allows them to reshape the world, but because it profoundly suits their own tastes and inclinations. Thus our work is both our means of achieving our material well-being, which is our fundamental priority, and the means of accomplishing our own distinctively personal ends at the same time.

Productive Work as One's Central Purpose

Because one's basic purpose is the maintenance of one's life, and productive work is the principal means of achieving that end, one's productive work deserves a high priority among one's various purposes. Both Ayn Rand and Leonard Peikoff have emphasized this point by arguing that productive work is the sole, "central value" upon which all others depend. Rand put her point this way, elaborating on the meaning of the cardinal values:

Productive work is the central *purpose* of a rational man's life, the central value that integrates and determines the hierarchy of all the other values. Reason is the source, the precondition of his productive work, — pride is the result.²³

Leonard Peikoff clarifies the idea of a central value with these remarks:

A central purpose is the long-range goal that constitutes the primary claimant on a man's time, energy, and resources. All his other goals, however worthwhile, are secondary and must be integrated to this purpose. The others are to be pursued only when such pursuit complements the primary, rather than detracting from it.²⁴

Diagram 5.6 examines this argument, as presented by Peikoff in his treatise *Objectivism*, in more detail. Unlike most of the diagrams in our book,

diagram 5.6 illustrates an *inaccurate* line of reasoning.²⁵ Our primary purpose in this book is to lay out the structure of Objectivism, not to criticize the writings of Ayn Rand or other Objectivist philosophers. However the claim that productive work should be regarded as establishing the “hierarchy of all the other values” merits attention on our part in virtue of its prominence, and because it clashes implicitly with the basis of Objectivist ethics in the ultimate value of life.

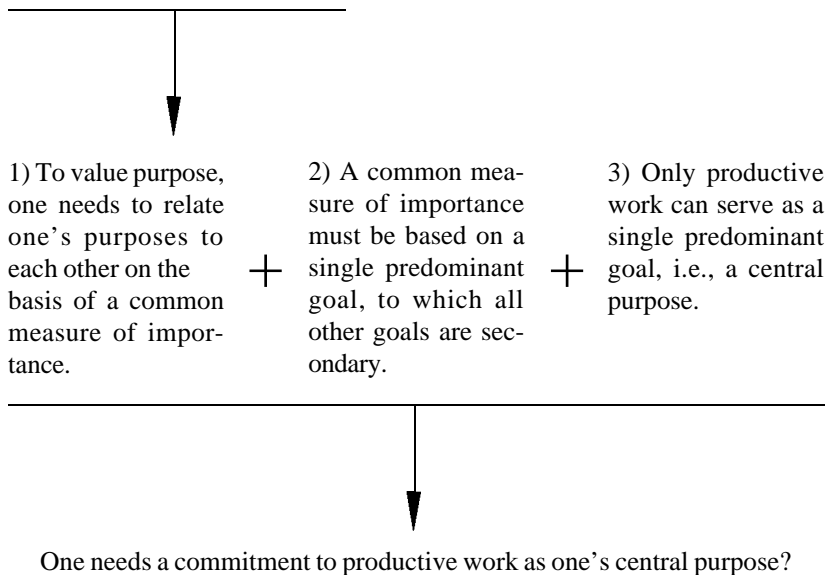
Diagram 5.6 begins our discussion of the Rand/Peikoff “central value” argument with the cardinal value of purpose. This is **Premise 1a: one needs to value purpose**. From premise 1, we can directly infer further details from the nature of the cardinal value of purpose. The inference used in this diagram is expressed as **Premise 1: to value purpose, one needs to relate one's purposes to one another on the basis of a common measure of importance**.

Diagram 5.6: Productive Work as One's “Central Purpose”

Inductive Evidence

3a) *This is a false generalization*

1a) One needs to value purpose.



Recall that to value purpose is to value acting on and for one's purposes, consistently and with determination. This means that one's purposes must be ranked, and one must be able to choose clearly between them depending on one's needs and circumstances. This is a point we noted in Chapter 4, when discussed purpose as a cardinal value. There we noted that valuing purpose implies appreciating the hierarchical nature of one's goals. As we observed in Chapter 2, a system of values must be an orderly hierarchy: the alternative is a system in which values conflict and one literally cannot choose consistently between one goal and another.²⁶

Imagine a person who values movie-going and work, but has no consistent means of relating those values to each other. How would he decide to see a movie, or to work? To choose one or the other, he would have to consider it to be the greater value in his current circumstances. But to do that, is to be able to relate the two values to each other, which is the ability he is supposed to lack in the first place. One might *act* in such a condition, but one would act in an incoherent, arbitrary manner, not a purposeful one. The person with the movie/work dilemma might lurch spasmodically toward the movie theater for a moment, then scurry back to the office, lurch back again, and so on.

In order to relate one's purposes to each other one needs a standard by which to relate them. This is the thrust of premise 1. A standard is a specific item or amount of something that one uses as a basis for comparison. To compare two things, they must share some dimension or aspect in common. One can judge size, but not thought, in inches, for example. If there can be no standard for comparing two things, there must be no dimension they share in common. Similarly, if there were no dimension of evaluation along which two purposes were commensurable, then one would have no means of comparing the two, and thus no means of preferring one to another.

Premise 2 describes the nature of such a standard: **a common measure of importance must be based on a single predominant goal, to which all other goals are secondary.** As we saw in Chapter 2, it is life that serves as this predominant goal in the Objectivist ethics. Ultimately, the importance of something is the benefit or harm it can do to one's life, of which one is usually aware in the form of feelings, e.g. pleasure and emotions, e.g. happiness. Without such a predominant, ultimate end, no hierarchy of values would be coherent. And only life is a process that can serve as such end in a self-sustaining manner. We need to bear in mind the objective basis of our values: *for any living organism, its life is its ultimate value.* Life is what provides the standard.

However, Rand and Peikoff now make the somewhat confusing claim that productive work is the predominant goal. This is **Premise 3: only productive work can serve as a single predominant goal, i.e., a central purpose.** As this claim is not *intended* to contradict the fact that life is the ultimate value, perhaps it is based on the following type of analysis: whereas life is an

overarching, all-inclusive goal, one's work is a particular purpose among others. The point is that one particular purpose must predominate. As Peikoff puts it, "all [one's] other goals, however worthwhile, are secondary and must be integrated to this purpose. The others are to be pursued only when such pursuit complements the primary, rather than detracting from it."²⁷

Premise 3 seems to say that one should pursue rest and relaxation, for instance, or romantic love, only insofar as they are "integrated" to one's work. If this means that one's rest or romance should never take any time or energy from one's work, this is absurd.²⁸ On the other hand, if it simply means that both one's work and one's romance should be part of one's overall pursuit of happiness in life, then the idea of work as a "central value" is vacuous.

It is one thing to note, as we did in diagram 2.1, that any chain of means and ends must terminate in some ultimate end. It is another matter, and one none too logical, to claim that in any particular group of goals, one goal must predominate over the others. Say you go out shopping: you plan to stop at the grocery store, the nursery, the shoe outlet. You are going to take care of a shortfall in your pantry, your desire to spruce up your garden, and your need for new pair of work shoes. You have to prioritize your trip: perhaps shoes first, plants second, and groceries last because you plan to buy some frozen foods. Or perhaps plants first because the nursery is far from home. The point of this example is that none of these concrete goals is absolutely "secondary" to the others. You go on the trip to serve higher level purposes, such as your fundamental need for food, or a taste for fresh fish, and so on. Even at the high level of abstraction where we choose between productive work and romance, we still need not rate one as "secondary," except insofar as, relative to our needs, we choose one over the other at a given moment. This is because *life* provides the standard by which we choose.

It is true, as we note in diagram 5.5, that one's commitment to achieving material values must be fundamental, to reflect the fundamental role they play in human survival. In this sense, one's productive work is a fundamental purpose. But breathing is a fundamental purpose too: without breathing, one cannot live. This does not make breathing the "central value." Work is also the means to attaining wealth, which is the means, as we have noted, to all manner of values. So productive work is a very important value, but its importance depends on one's need for wealth as against other values one might spend time achieving. This implies that productive work should play a large role in one's life. But one could say the same for friendship, and other broad means of gaining key values.

If they were true, together premises 1, 2 and 3 would yield the following conclusion for diagram 5.6: **one needs a commitment to productive work as one's central purpose**. As we have seen, however, there is no reason to think that one must have one central purpose in this sense. Certainly, it is not the

case that one needs a second predominant goal in addition to the ultimate value of life, in order to have a consistent hierarchy of purposes, so premise 2 and premise 3 cannot be reasonably combined. Productive work is very central to one's life, but it is *not* predominant over all one's purposes.

The “central value” thesis tries to say too much at once. In its broadest interpretation, it is more than a claim about productive work. It is also a claim that one should approach all one's goals with the seriousness of work, and take responsibility for exerting the effort needs to achieve them. Thus Ayn Rand viewed motherhood as a “proper” full-time activity, only “if [the mother] approaches it as a career.”²⁹ When a couple decides to have children, they do not do so, in the modern context, out of any hope of direct material benefit, though the spiritual and social values they obtain may be myriad.³⁰ Parenthood isn't a career of productive work in the core meaning of the term — ignoring day-care providers, nannies, and the like— but it is *like* a career, in that it requires a long-term focused effort to achieve an end. It, like productive work, is an instance of a broader commitment to achieving one's values in the world. The meaning of such a commitment, and the logic behind it, are the subject of diagram 5.7.

Productiveness, Achievement, and Responsibility

Each virtue is a commitment to a policy of action, based on the recognition of certain facts. In its broadest sense, productiveness is a pervasive commitment that extends beyond the production of material values, or the pursuit of a career. It is the virtue that corresponds to the cardinal value of purpose. Its policy of action is the exertion of one's own effort to achieve values. It is based on the basic recognition that one must take responsibility for making that exertion and seeing it to fruition. For this reason, the virtue we are discussing is sometimes called “responsibility” in the Objectivist literature.³¹

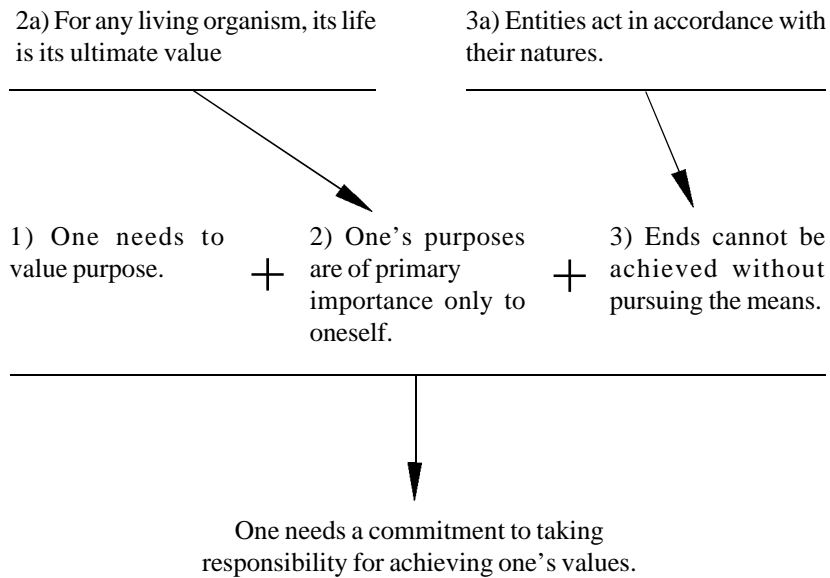
Diagram 5.7 lays out the justification of this conception of productiveness, beginning with the cardinal value of purpose.

Premise 1 reminds us of the conclusion of diagram 4.1: **one needs to value purpose**. Recall that in Chapter 4 we characterized this value as a commitment to acting on purpose, to knowing one's goals and to orienting one's life around achieving them. As a conscious orientation toward to one's proper ends, it captures an essential aspect of the process we embrace in the choice to live.

Premise 2 states that **one's purposes are of primary importance only to oneself**. This follows from **premise 2a**, which restates the basis of the Objectivist ethics: **for any living organism, its life is its ultimate value**. Ayn Rand noted that a value presupposes an answer to the questions: “Of value to whom?” and “Of value for what?” One's values as such are always values to oneself primarily.³² To a person alone in a wilderness, this point would be self-evident. In a social context, it requires a slight explication.

Diagram 5.7: Productiveness and Responsibility

Inductive Evidence: No new induction



If others are egoists, then they will include one's own purposes among their values only to the extent that those purposes indirectly offer them a value to their own lives. For instance, a woman may love skiing, and her husband, no schusser himself, may support her hobby by going on trips to the mountains with her. He does not do this because her skiing is directly valuable to him. His health is not improved by her workout, nor are his reactions sharpened by the thrill of racing down the slope. He encourages her skiing because he loves her and recognizes that skiing is good for her. And he is right to do so, if her well-being ultimately redounds to his own long-term benefit, not hers. That is to say, others may value one's purposes, but shouldn't do so if at the price of their own.

Premise 3 states that **ends cannot be achieved without pursuing the means**. This is the recognition that to achieve one's purposes, one must exert the effort to see them through. It is a corollary of the law of causality, which is **Premise 3a: entities act in accordance with their natures**. Because effects do not exist without causes, it is impossible for an end to come into being without the means that lead to it. This fact is recognized in logic and the basic method of

practical reasoning. Although one can abstract an end from its means, and indeed any particular end may or may not have several distinct means by which it can occur, in reality the aim of attaining some end must as a practical matter include the attainment of its means. Thus one cannot be a physician without learning medicine, for example, any more than one could maintain a good reputation without practicing integrity.

Taken together premises 1, 2, and 3 allow us to **conclude** that we must take initiative and responsibility to see our own projects through: **one needs a commitment to taking responsibility for achieving one's values.** This is a broader principle than the claim that one must acquire material values by production and trade. It is the recognition that to succeed in any of our purposes, we must approach life as the artist does the canvas, and take action to make our dreams come true. It is the positive side of the fact recognized by the saying: "wishing won't make it so."

Productiveness is thus a pervasive commitment to approaching life entrepreneurially. It requires that one realize, as premise 2 indicates, that one's own purposes will never have the direct import to others, for one's own sake, that they do to oneself. It requires that one realize that, as premise 3 indicates, that to aim for an end implies being willing to undertake the means it requires. In consonance with these realizations, the cardinal virtue of productiveness has two essential poles or modes:

- *Achievement.* A commitment to achievement, to taking action to create one's values and realize one's aspirations, is the hallmark of a valuer. It is the character trait of being engaged with the world and of seeing life as an open-ended opportunity to create meaning. It is the attitude summed up in the determination to be a person who "gets things done."
- *Responsibility.* A commitment to responsibility is the recognition that one's life and values are always primarily important to oneself. It means regarding oneself as the ultimate source of one's efforts, and regarding one's efforts as the basic means by which one's goals are to be realized. It implies the upright declaration that "the buck stops here" when it comes to one's own needs and aspirations.

Incorporated into one's character, these two poles represent a commitment to be engaged with life as participant, rather than a spectator. A responsible achiever recognizes that friendship requires effort if it is to blossom, that raising a child is a project to be regarded with seriousness with which one engages a career. Such a person with this kind of character will make of his entire life "productive work," in a metaphorical sense, placing his stamp on the world around him, both physical and social.

Each virtue of Objectivism represents a unity of theory with practice. But in the given case, some virtues emphasize the cognitive (“theory”), where others call our attentions to the existential (“practice”). Productiveness has the active creation of values, especially material values, as its focus; it emphasizes the unity of theory with *practice*. Now we turn our attention back to cognition, to the unity of *theory* with practice, in considering the virtue of honesty.

Honesty

We have already discussed the fact that the Objectivist virtues are essentially aspects of living by reason. This is abundantly clear in the case of the virtue of honesty, the formulation of which differs from that of rationality by just one crucial word: “truth.”

- Rationality is a commitment to grasping *reality* and acting accordingly.
- Honesty is a commitment to grasping *the truth* and acting accordingly.

How is a commitment to grasping the truth different from a commitment to grasping reality? They are derived from distinct fundamental aspects of knowledge. Knowledge is a kind of awareness: that’s what the *grasp* of reality is. As *awareness*, having knowledge contrasts with being *unaware*. As *truth*, on the other hand, knowing the *facts* contrasts with believing a *falsehood*. Falsehood is not the absence of information, but the presence of misinformation. Human beings are especially capable of creating this peculiar kind of lack of knowledge. Because conceptual thought is volitional and creative, we can form propositions, claims, stories, and ideas that do not correspond to reality. It is this basic fact that lies behind our need for honesty. As Leonard Peikoff put it, “If rationality is the commitment to reality; then honesty... is the rejection of unreality.”³³

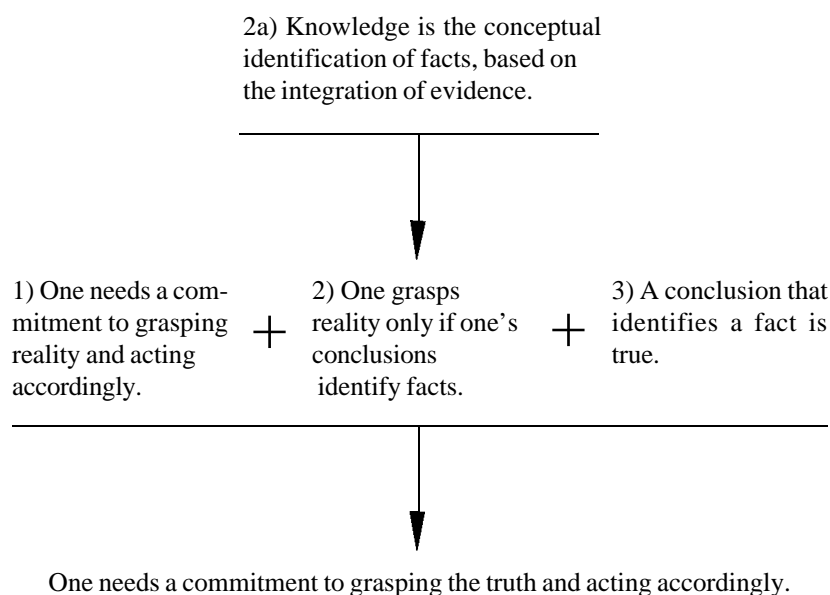
This point is what we seek to establish in Diagram 5.8 :

Diagram 5.8 begins with our need for the virtue of rationality: **One needs a commitment to grasping reality and acting accordingly. (Premise 1a)**. In our discussion of diagram 5.1, we pointed out that our need for rationality arises because of the fact that reason is fallible. We need therefore to attend to the requirements of achieving conceptual knowledge.

How does honesty fit in here? To see how, we will have to establish the epistemological role of truth. **Premise 2a** restates a generalization that we first saw in diagram 1.2: **knowledge is the conceptual identification of facts, based on the integration of evidence**. This fact lies implicitly behind our need for rationality; here we state it explicitly to point out a simple fact about conceptual knowledge: **one grasps reality only if one’s conclusions correspond to facts. (Premise 2)**. In our discussion of diagram 4.3, we discussed the difference be-

tween a coherence theory of knowledge and a correspondence theory. Premise 2 highlights the fact that correspondence, the identification of facts, is the primary characteristic of knowledge.

Diagram 5.8: Honesty and Rationality



Honesty is a commitment to truth. To see this, we must first establish what truth is. This is the role of **Premise 3: a conclusion that identifies a fact is true**. Truth is the relation that exists between a person's ideas and their referents in reality, when he correctly identifies a fact. If one thinks: "there is a small dog in this house," and indeed, there is such a being, then one has formulated a truth.

The truth of one's ideas is a fact about the ideas and their meaning, not about how one reached those ideas. One can consider a true idea without knowing that it is true, just as one can proceed rationally, yet fail to reach the truth because of subtle mistakes in integration, or because one overlooked an obscure but significant fact. Because of this, we distinguish in epistemology between truth itself and the means by which one establishes the truth.³⁴

Those means depend on our reliance on truth as the ultimate standard

by which we judge an idea. One might come up with an idea for any number of reasons, such as achieving acceptance from others, or adhering to one's most cherished dreams, or discovering a new invention. This is not always wrong, but one must take care that one does not consider an idea that serves another end as part of one's knowledge. An idea that does not correspond to the facts is a misrepresentation, a fantasy, an idea disconnected from reality. As we noted in Chapter 1, truth is the fundamental goal of an objective process of thought. Imagination has its proper place in our lives, but we should never confuse the imaginary with the objective.

If one's thought processes automatically sought out and adhered to the truth, then there would be no need for a virtue of honesty. But in fact, adherence to the truth is not automatic. One needs a commitment to truth because we make mistakes and form false conclusions, and we can do so not only accidentally, but through an intentional process of misrepresentation, one that requires us to evade the facts. As the diagram shows, to deliberately substitute falsehood for truth is to sabotage the core function of our minds.

Misrepresentation is a widespread practice, as we can tell by looking around us or reading psychological and ethical studies. Introspectively we can observe our own tendencies in this regard, and the effects of misrepresentation on our own thought. All this inductive evidence should strike you as evidence of an important issue in human life. Premises 1, 2, and 3, together with this evidence of importance, give us reason to **conclude that one needs a commitment to grasping the truth and acting accordingly.**

Drawing on the facts we have examined in this and preceding diagrams, we can see that evading the truth has three basic effects on one's cognition. First, it gives one mental contents one cannot depend on —namely, the falsehoods one has accepted. Second, it causes one to develop a character trait (diagram 5.4) of tolerating contradictions in one's thinking, which in time is likely to lead one to accept further falsehoods. In diagrams 3.5 and 4.3 we studied the importance of integrating one's knowledge to check for errors, but such a process becomes impossible if one is unwilling to confront certain falsehoods, or if one has the character trait of tolerating falsehoods. The failure to integrate one's knowledge results in the third effect: the mistakes one normally makes in cognition, will be more likely to pass unchecked, further multiplying the amount of "corrupt data" in one's mind. This is particularly pernicious, because one would not be conscious of any evasion in forming *honestly mistaken* conclusions, yet they would be just as harmful as one's willful misrepresentations. Note that these three effects are *epistemological*; to them can be added the *psychological* effects of disregard for the truth, which can include anxiety, confusion, uncertainty, and dogmatism.

Honesty is essentially a cognitive commitment to seeking the truth. Therefore, it is not primarily a social virtue, but a profound need of the indi-

vidual qua individual. Even in a wilderness, far from society, one would need a commitment to truth as the goal of one's thinking. One would still need objective knowledge, and one could only attain objectivity by turning to reality, rather than one's preconceptions or fantasies, as the final arbiter in the realm of ideas.

Honesty is not only a commitment not to lie to oneself, but the recognition that the truth is of greater value than any particular idea. This means one should reject ideas that contradict the facts, although it does not mean one should assume an idea is false simply because it isn't immediately confirmed in experience. Many great ideas of science have seemed implausible at first, but have been proved out by more thorough investigation. So honesty also means being open to proof, and undertaking the effort required to validate one's ideas.

Like any teleological virtue, honesty is not an a-contextual imperative; it is not a commandment to seek proof for every idea one encounters, without regard for the importance of the idea or the effort required to establish its truth or falsity. Honesty means developing the character of one who makes a priority of establishing the truth of ideas that seem important. That character will likely give one an inclination to always seek proof and to worry away at dubious notions; it is a matter of prudent allocation of one's time to decide whether the effort of attaining that proof is worthwhile. Honesty is not an easy character trait to develop, because it demands that one re-examine cherished theories and values, and that one attend carefully to the connection between one's abstract ideas and concrete facts. But it is a virtue that rewards one with clarity of mind and a profound sense of certainty. It makes one more self-consciously aware of the actual state of affairs in one's life and the wider world, and thereby mitigates any tendencies to fundamental anxiety. Every virtue enhances one's self-esteem because practicing it consists in undertaking a class of actions of great practical importance to oneself as the ultimate beneficiary. But honesty has a more profound effect: it undergirds one's self-esteem with an abiding, rational confidence in one's ability to know the truth and to choose based on that knowledge, a confidence that one needs in order to cope well with the trials one often encounters in life.³⁵ It is this confidence that gives one the strength to learn from one's mistakes, and believe in one's future prospects no matter how bleak the present. An honest person takes the "benevolent universe" premise deeply to heart, accepting the fact that the truth is always at root a boon.

What about honesty in a social context? The argument in Diagram 5.8 is quite abstract, and it does not obviously demonstrate that common dishonesty towards others is wrong. After all, what does "acting accordingly" with one's grasp of the truth amount to here? One might agree with Diagram 5.8, but argue that lying to others does not undermine reason, since one can lie, yet take responsibility for keeping the facts straight in one's own head. Lying in this view is a social issue, not a cognitive one. In movies and novels, this is how brilliant swindlers succeed: they *know* the truth; what they *say* is another matter. And of

course, anyone can experiment with speaking a few words of falsehood, and most of us have done so. We can tell the difference between what we said in those cases, and what the truth was. But there is vast difference between saying a few false words, such as “the sky is pink,” and actually attempting to sustain a falsehood in order to obtain a value.

Diagram 5.9 presents a more detailed argument for honesty that shows why lying to others in normal circumstances is not a reliable means of obtaining values. In *Atlas Shrugged*, Ayn Rand summarized this rationale for honesty by writing that:

...an attempt to gain a value by deceiving the mind of others is an act of raising your victims to a position higher than reality, where you become a pawn of their blindness, a slave of their non-thinking and evasions, while their intelligence, their rationality, their perceptiveness become the enemies you have to dread and flee.³⁶

Diagram 5.9 shows why the liar must fear the perspicacity of those he deceives, and why an attempt to gain values by deception fruitlessly subordinates one's mind to others.

Before we go through the diagram, we should note that there are three basic types of values one might seek to gain by deception.³⁷ First, one could attempt to deceive oneself, perhaps in the hope of enjoying a pleasant, sustainable, and delimited fantasy. One might say, for example, that religious faith plays the role of a pleasant fantasy in the minds of many people: they believe because without belief, the world seems darker and more hostile. Second, one might hope to defraud someone, that is, deceive him into giving up a greater value than he would have done had he known the facts. Finally, one might deceive another for his own sake, as when one hopes to boost a friend's self-esteem by exaggerating his beauty or abilities. We will treat examples from each of these types in the course of our discussion of Diagram 5.9.

Premise 1 defines deception: **Deception is a deliberate misrepresentation of facts.** But what is it about reality that makes deception dangerous?

Premise 2 supplies the information that **any fact is interconnected with other facts in reality.** This is an inductive observation of the broadest sort, and it is crucial to the rationale for the virtue of honesty. If we could easily isolate misrepresentations from everything else, then they would much less troublesome. But because things in the world affect other things, each fact, each thing we know about, is related to others. For example, imagine that we were to lie to a friend about what we were doing on Saturday night (say we went to a concert to which we should have invited him). Because facts are interrelated, we must try to keep related information from our deceived friend. We would try to avoid mentioning Saturday night or the concert in his presence, for example,

and take care not to discuss it with people he knows. But facts are interconnected in many ways: we can't easily anticipate all the ways in which the victim of our deception might come across the facts.

Diagram 5.9: Honesty and Deception

Inductive Evidence:

1: Introspection, psychology

5: Psychology, economics

1) Deception is a deliberate misrepresentation of the facts. + 2) Any fact is interconnected with other facts in reality. + 3) All conceptual knowledge is acquired by cognitive integration.

4) Deception is likely to work only to the extent that those deceived are unable or unwilling to integrate actively. + 5) To the extent that a person does not integrate actively, he will not be able to offer value.

6) Deception is not an effective means of achieving values.

One needs a commitment to grasping the truth and acting accordingly.

The interrelated nature of facts causes a problem for deception because of the epistemological principle summarized in **Premise 3: all knowledge is acquired by cognitive integration**. This is a premise we established in diagram 1.2. The people we attempt to deceive are not passive objects, but have active minds that should normally be engaged in acquiring, integrating, and applying information. This means that **deception is likely to work only to the extent that those deceived are unable or unwilling to integrate actively**. This intermediate conclusion is **Premise 4**.

To see how premises 1, 2, and 3 fit together to give us premise 4, let's return to our example. Suppose a mutual acquaintance who attended the concert mentions to our friend that he noticed what goofy dancers we are when he saw us cutting the rug at the concert. Our friend is now likely to be deceived about our activities on Saturday only if he does not integrate this new fact with the story we told him. What if the topic of the concert comes up in conversation a week later? The circle of deception would begin to expand, involving more and more people, adapting to more and more objections.

Yet the example of our deceived friend is really a case of a trivial lie, meant to avoid a minor embarrassment. The situation becomes even more complicated if we attempt to gain a significant value through deception. If we were to lie about our accomplishments, for instance, in order to get a job or impress people, it is hard to see how we could sustain the lie over time. The more that's at stake, the more the victims have reason to pay attention for discrepancies and take the time to establish the truth. An employer, for example, will ask for a copy of a diploma, or give one's previous workplaces a call. A lie can rarely be self-contained, especially a significant lie. We can summarize this point in the form of a principle: *to sustain a deception, one must anticipate the objections of others and fabricate further misrepresentations in response*. To keep a lie going, one must constantly adjust one's story to conform to the beliefs of one's listeners. One must devote ever-increasing mental effort to remembering what lies one has told, and to making up new lies that are likely to seem plausible. In effect, one becomes embroiled in a vicious circle. This is common knowledge, reflected in the well-known couplet:

“O, what a tangled web we weave,
when first we practice to deceive!”³⁸

Notice that the thought one puts into sustaining a deception comes at the expense of thinking about real problems and facts. This is the point that Rand emphasized in writing that deception “is an act of raising your victims to a position higher than reality.”³⁹ In effect, deception compromises one's *independence*, a subject we will discuss in detail in Chapter 6. Anticipating the mental objections of others and keeping track of their idiosyncratic preferences

and contexts of knowledge are skills that it takes time and effort to develop. Acquiring them naturally comes at the price of developing skill in addressing more fundamental facts and more personal concerns. This is the situation of Peter Keating at the close of *The Fountainhead*: he has become too adept at conforming to others, and deceiving them where he can, to be competent at identifying his own needs and goals, to say nothing of achieving them. Note also that insofar as deception requires that one attempt to plausibly integrate falsehoods into one's knowledge, it is likely to have the deleterious epistemological effects that we noted in discussing diagram 5.8.

Since the practice of deception is clearly harmful to one's own cognition and character, it would have to yield more than trivial values from its victims. But a deception can only be a source of significant value if those providing the value fail to notice the discrepancies between reality and the claims of the deceiver, despite having substantial reason to do so. What sort of people are likely to think in this way? Which are likely not to practice a commitment to seeking out the truth themselves? Which are not likely to be able to see through a clever deception? The people one is likely to take in are of the sort who are not mentally active. But then, what value could hope to gain from such people?

As **Premise 5** puts it, **to the extent that a person does not integrate actively, he will not be able to offer value**. This means that deception only works with those who don't integrate: the ignorant, the irrational and the exceptionally stupid; these are the people least likely to be able to offer us value. One might say that this claim is an application of the principle that reason is man's basic means of gaining values. But it cannot be reached by deduction. Instead, it rests on a broad body of direct inductive evidence. One must look to one's experience of society and knowledge of social interactions to test its validity. It is not an obvious inductive generalization and it requires some reflection.

It is a widespread folk myth that lying can pay off. In part, this is an aspect of the romantic (or at least lucrative) light in which crime is often cast in novels and films. Many people are fascinated by idea of the successful swindler, but this may be due more to the counterfactual character of this idea than to its familiarity in practice. However, most everyone knows an anecdote or two in which a lie seems to succeed.

Sometimes a lie serves to help one preserve a value. One might lie to a mugger, for instance, about how much money one is carrying. Instances like this do not contradict Premise 5: a mugger, after all, attempts to *take* value, not offer it, and a mugger is unlikely to be a person committed to reason. However, there are cases where lies have been known to result in the acquisition of some sort of value. The question is, can one derive any consistent policy of ethics from such events? Some might argue that we need a principle on practical deception, that we can attach to Premise 5 as a "rider."

In many cases where lies seem to pay off, the victim is a party with

whom one expects to interact only once, and then anonymously. For instance: say one is in an airport, in a hurry to change planes. Airline companies give people with health problems special treatment, including whisking them about the terminal in an electric cart, yet the airline is generally not able to check or confirm whether one actually does have a disability. So, one could pretend to have a disability to get special treatment, and one's chance of discovery would be lowered by the brief nature of the encounter.

Instances such as this reflect a principle of game theory that has interested economists and political scientists.⁴⁰ Game theory stylizes an interaction into a small number of strategies each actor may choose. Each combination of strategies results in distinct, quantified pay-offs to each party.⁴¹ In stylized situations such as the famous "prisoner's dilemma" game, interaction in an extended, repeated context results in different equilibrium (i.e. "correct") strategies than does a one-time interaction.⁴² This means that in a game like the "Prisoner's Dilemma,"— which, if "played" just once, leads to a "defection" or "cheating" result that harms everyone — repetition of the game over an indefinite period leads to a result that one should actually *not* "defect." Essentially, this occurs in the "game" model because, over time, one can punish bad behavior by withholding one's own cooperation.⁴³

This is more widely recognized outside the stylized realm of game theory as an effect of reputation. When one interacts regularly with others, they get to know one's habits and character. As we have noted in diagram 5.4, one develops an honest character, and thereby an honest reputation, through practicing honesty as a consistent principle. An honest person can be taken for what he seems to be, which encourages others to be more forthcoming and benevolent towards him. A dishonest person reaps what he sows, and receives a cold shoulder and distrust from others. The kinds of people who wouldn't notice a deceptive character are those who are generally unobservant or erratic in their behavior. This is just the point of Premise 5: such people aren't the kind from whom one could gain much. Children, for instance, are the kind of people one can lie to and "get away with it," but what could children offer to reward such a strategy? For ethics, the important point is that whether or not situations occasionally emerge in which one can "cheat" and thereby gain in some short-run sense, they are at best rare and not easily identified in the course of normal, peaceful social intercourse. Given that such situations are quite rare, to be constantly on the alert for them twists one's character away from more common and fruitful sources of value. This is why a "principle of practical deception" is *impractical*.

The examples we have considered so far focus on material values, but the argument in diagram 5.9 applies to spiritual and social values as well. For example, many people conceive that one best upholds a valuable friendship or romantic relationship by the appropriate use of deception. However, the dis-

tinctive value one gains from these relationships is *visibility*, which is the perception of oneself through the response of others (as we noted in diagram 4.5). If the friend or loved one responds to one's pose or lies, rather than one's true self, then what one will receive from them is not visibility, but a reflected deception. This will tend to cause the relationship to seem unrewarding and artificial to the deceiver.⁴⁴ And of course such deceptions are especially difficult to sustain: the more intimate the relationship and the more personal the value one hopes to gain, the more difficult it is to sustain the lie that is meant to gain it.

So, Premises 4 and 5 lead to the intermediate conclusion stated in **Premise 6: deception is not an effective means of achieving values.** This naturally entails that we should avoid employing misrepresentation and deception. So Premise 6 leads to the conclusion of the diagram: **One needs a commitment to grasping the truth and acting in accordance with it.** Diagram 5.9 does not change our description of honesty, but it enriches our understanding of what it means to act in accordance with our grasp of the truth.

We can also apply this argument to analyzing the effects of self-deception. Although it is a common practice, self-deception presents a kind of philosophical puzzle: if you lie to yourself, who is deceiving whom? But if we reflect on how self-deception takes place, we see that it is not the case of person who firmly grasps the truth, casting lies out at himself. Rather, self-deception usually occurs when we fail to give sufficient attention to the truth in the first place.

Evasion and rationalization are the primary means by which one can deceive oneself. Evasion is the practice of ignoring facts, of blanking out and not thinking. Rationalization exploits the fact that errors in complex arguments are hard to detect: it is often relatively easy to provide specious reasons to support a cherished notion in the face of apparently contrary evidence. Whereas evasion ignores a fact: that one can't afford those new cloths, that one's lover is capricious and abusive, for example, rationalization ignores the difference between "possible" and "probable." A rationalizer construes what might plausibly seem to be the case, into what certainly is the case, exploiting the aspect of forming knowledge where bias is most possible. Both practices create within one's own mind the same spreading circle of misrepresentation that is created by lying to others, but in this case, the disruption is entirely internal.

Why would one seek to deceive oneself? Our needs to avoid pain and achieve self-esteem are both felt very directly and intimately, while other considerations, especially those distant in time and place, are easier to ignore. For this reason many people make the avoidance of pain or the defense of their self-conception a priority above all others. They prefer to interpret life in the most comforting terms, and hope for the best. This is the attitude of the unhappy child who escapes into a fantasy world, or of the spendthrift who always rationalizes his spending on the grounds of his current "needs."

Let's see how Diagram 5.9 applies to the case of self-deception. Pre-

mises 1, 2 and 3 summarize fundamental facts that lead to Premise 4. Premise 4 states that **deception is likely to work only to the extent that those deceived are unable or unwilling to integrate actively**. If one deceives oneself, this means that the bigger the deception, the more one will have to evade facts, or, similarly, accept plainly implausible rationalizations. One sees this among those mystics, for instance, who argue that they believe in heaven because they want to live in the hereafter, as if their belief determined the nature of reality. Notice that self-deception creates the same “tangled web” as the deception of others. As one seeks to defend one’s deception against reality, a small rationalization requires further rationalizations. Over time, convincing oneself of dubious argument will desensitize one to evasion, which is unfortunate, because evasion will be required, eventually, to fend off the unpleasant facts as they stare one in the face. So the mystic will pray for a cancer cure that will not come, and the spendthrift will have to blank-out the repossession of his computer and his car.

Premise 5 states that **to the extent that person does not integrate actively, he will not be able to offer value**. In the case of self-deception, this means that one will be less able to create value to the extent that one practices evasion and rationalization. These self-deceiving practices are doubly harmful in that they rebound on one’s other ideas, as we have seen. In a clash between an article of faith and one’s reasoned judgment, someone committed to faith will discard his judgment. This can lead to suicidal fanaticism, but it can also lead to more mundane psychological difficulties such as neurosis and anxiety. So the conclusion stated in Premise 6 still follows from the other premises: in the case of self-deception, **deception is not an effective means of achieving values**, for the similar reasons.

The argument in diagram 5.9 also applies to attempts to foster the welfare of others by deception. Say one attempts to raise a friend’s self-esteem and confidence by praising his dancing skills, though in fact he has poor sense of timing and often treads on his partner’s toes. This will succeed only to the extent that he ignores the facts of perception, such as cracking of his partners’ toes or his lack of dance partners. Worse, it can only be sustained if he fails to notice his own shortcomings, and thus can only discourage him from improving over time. In the end, he is likely to work out the truth in any case, and then his sense of worth will suffer from the realization that his friend holds him in too great a contempt to tell him the truth.

These are the reasons to incorporate the practice of honesty into one’s inner thought and outward communications. Of course, the need for honesty toward others does not make of virtue of offering improper or unsolicited criticisms to others: as we will see when we discuss the virtue of benevolence, civility does have value. One does better by telling one’s dancing friend that he is improving, and just needs to relax a little more, than by telling him he is a clodhopper. Honesty does not demand that one dwell on the negative at the expense

of the positive. But it does indicate that one is usually better off saying nothing to avoid offending than speaking falsely. And in general, as we've seen, a frank and truthful manner will encourage others to trust one's statements and deal with one in a more direct and open fashion, while allowing one to think objectively and act consistently.

Pride

Ayn Rand described pride as “moral ambitiousness,” because it is predicated on the aspiration to live up to one's ideals.⁴⁵ Pride is the principle of valuing one's self-esteem and taking the steps required to achieve it. We need such a principle because of our profound need for self-esteem, and because a robust self-esteem, grounded in the facts of reality, is not something we can achieve easily or automatically.

The antithesis of self-esteem is guilt: guilt for one's actions and guilt in oneself as their author. Historically, even as many ethical codes have condemned pride as a “deadly sin,” they have engendered guilt in their adherents by demanding compliance with moral ideals that are incompatible with life and happiness. To sustain a moral ideal that runs contrary to real human needs, these ethics make a virtue of humility, the moral antithesis of pride. Humility is the deprecation, on principle, of one's own actions, ability and character. In Christian ethics, for example, humility is the principle that encourages the faithful to despise reality and their own lives, and to sacrifice themselves to duty, others, and the Church.⁴⁶

Advocates of humility often characterize pride in terms of vanity and boasting. But objective pride is based in a rational recognition of facts in their proper context, and involves neither vanity nor boasting. Pride does not consist in unmerited admiration for oneself, or for some particular trait — such as physical beauty — out of its proper context. Nor does pride entail the false inflation of one's worth; *that* is merely self-deception, which, as we have just seen, is harmful to the self, not a source of self-esteem. In essence, when pride's critics treat it as vanity or boasting, they characterize a healthy trait in terms of an unhealthy distortion of it. This is rather like attacking those who choose to eat a healthy diet, because some people distort diet control into anorexia. It is a condemnation based on the nonessential similarity between the justified pride of a person taking credit for his accomplishments, and the hollow posturing of a braggart.

Self-esteem is the value pride aims at, but what justifies our regarding this as a value? Ayn Rand described *self-esteem* as “one's inviolate certainty that his mind is competent to think and his person is worthy of happiness, which means, worthy of life.”⁴⁸

Self-esteem is thus a positive self-assessment in terms of one's *compe-*

tendency and one's worthiness.

Diagram 5.10 contains two lines of argument (labeled “A” and “B”) that lay out the means of achieving the two respective elements of self-esteem: line “A” addresses the need to regard oneself as competent to act; line “B” addresses the need to see oneself as worthy to do so.

Both elements of self-esteem derive from the cardinal value of Self, which is expressed in **Premise 1: one needs to value oneself**. Before we can pursue these goals as legitimate values, we need to show that they actually follow from premise 1.

Why does the cardinal value of self entail a need for self-esteem? We noted in Chapter 4 that self-esteem is *preceded* by a commitment to oneself as the ultimate beneficiary of one's actions, and that upholding this value means valuing oneself as a unique individual. Valuing oneself is a kind of basic positive assessment, but as a form of appreciation we can only sustain it over the long term by seeing it as true in fact. We need the objective conviction that we are worthy to hold the highest place among our values, and that we are justified in placing confidence in our own choices. Imagine attempting to continue to value yourself in the face of the repeated acceptance of incompetence, humiliation and guilt. As a psychological matter, no one can long maintain a disconnection between his most fundamental commitment to himself, and his evaluation of himself in practice.

Self-esteem is thus essential to the healthy functioning of the human organism. It is hard to imagine how one could regularly experience happiness in life without some measure of self-esteem. Happiness amounts to the savoring of one's values, in terms of one's own benefit from those values. How could one experience joy, if pervaded by a sense of unworthiness? How could one experience efficacy, if pervaded by a sense of incompetence?

Furthermore, as Nathaniel Branden has argued, a solid sense of self-esteem serves as the “immune system of consciousness.”⁴⁹ It makes one more able to withstand the vicissitudes of life, and gives one the confidence one needs in times of adversity or struggle. It also serves as deep reserve of strength that one can rely on when wrestling with psychological or emotional problems. As Branden puts it: “the value of self-esteem lies not merely in the fact that it makes us *feel* better but that it allows us to *live* better—to respond to challenges and opportunities more resourcefully and more appropriately.”⁵⁰

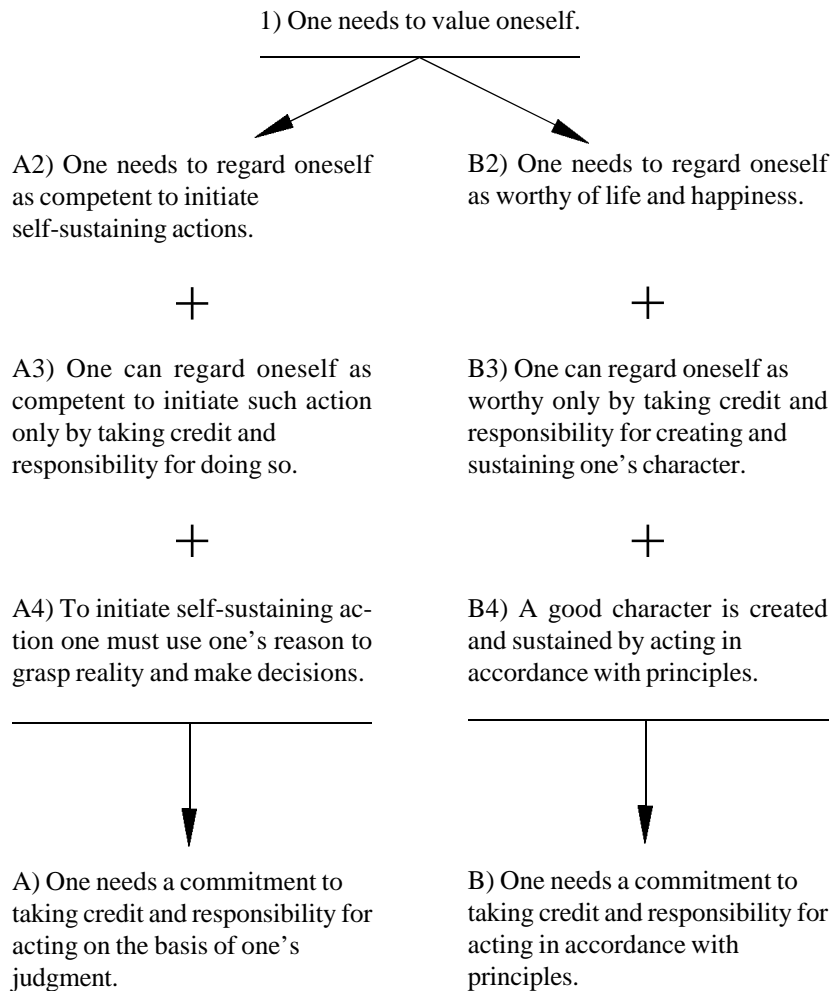
We can therefore infer directly from premise 1 that one needs both of the basic aspects of self-esteem. We will take each of these aspects in turn.

To trace the “A” line of argument—which centers on the competency aspect of self-esteem—we infer **Premise A2: one needs to regard oneself as competent to initiate self-sustaining actions**. Notice that this premise is not merely a deduction from premise 1, but is derived by considering the cardinal value of self in the light of the rich evidence on human nature that it integrates.

The virtue of pride aims at the two forms of positive self-assessment that constitute self-esteem. On the one hand, pride results in a positive assessment of one's actions. This corresponds to the competency aspect of self-esteem. On the other hand, pride results in esteem of oneself as their author. Pride

Diagram 5.10: Pride

Inductive Evidence: A3, B3: Psychology, introspection.



results in being able to look at one's accomplishments and say both "I did it" and "it is good." This is the perspective of a person of well-founded self-esteem.

Because pride is a commitment to achieving a positive assessment of oneself in the full context of one's life, it consists in two essential perspectives: looking backward and looking forward in time. These two perspectives provide one with the objective appreciation of one's past accomplishments on the one hand, and the commitment to success in the future on the other hand.

Pride in one's past means *taking credit* for one's specific achievements, pausing to recognize oneself with either "I did it," or "This is good" One should also take credit as a self-made being, for simply being who one is. This includes taking credit for one's accomplishments of character and personal development.

As an orientation toward the future, pride consists in *taking responsibility* for enhancing one's self-esteem, for building one's character, for being worthy of life. It means striving for moral and therefore existential improvement, with oneself as the beneficiary. For example, this means taking responsibility for one's material success and professional development by seeing to it that one pursues an enriching career or method of living that will help one become what one wants to be.

These two perspectives of pride are inseparable, because one cannot achieve self-esteem by means one without the other. By taking responsibility, one makes sure one will have objective reasons to assess oneself positively as time moves forward. But to make that positive assessment, one must take credit for one's actual accomplishments. One cannot experience self-esteem without taking credit, and one cannot earn it without taking responsibility.

With this point in hand, we ready to apply the two perspectives of pride to the argument in line "A."

Premise A3 summarizes the means by which we can achieve a sense of competency: **one can regard oneself as competent to initiate such action only by taking credit and responsibility for doing so.** Note that premise 3 is a fresh inductive point, one that depends on a wide range of introspective and psychological evidence. In recent years, a school of "self-esteem" psychology has grown up that equates self-esteem with nothing more than an inflated sense of self. But in fact, genuine self-esteem is based on objective achievements, as has been noted in empirical studies of the subject.⁵¹ This is only natural, since claims of competency, as we all know from our experience, are soon challenged by reality when one attempts to act on them. Claiming to be able to drive a truck, for example, will not keep one out of a wreck if one doesn't actually know how to drive. Similarly, claiming to be in control of one's life matters little if one's choices tend to result in the frustration of one's goals rather than their achievement.

What does initiating action essentially consist in, in the human case?

As we saw in Chapter 3, **to initiate self-sustaining action one must use one's reason to grasp reality and make decisions**. This is **Premise A4**. In other words, as we observed in discussing rationality, the choice to think is the root of all action, and rationality is theme of all virtue. The essence of rationality is acting on one's own objective judgment.

Together, premises A2, A3 and A4 lead us to the following conclusion, which is labeled **A** on the diagram: **One needs a commitment to taking credit and responsibility for acting on the basis of one's own judgment**. This commitment is the means to the "competency" aspect of self-esteem.

We derive means to the "worthiness" aspect of self-esteem by a parallel line of argument. To begin, we infer from Premise 1 that **one needs to regard oneself as worthy of life and happiness (Premise B2)**. Like premise A2, premise B2 is not a deduction from Premise 1, but follows from a consideration of the cardinal value of self in light of further psychological evidence. This evidence, which we surveyed above, indicates that a profound and ongoing esteem for ourselves as moral ends motivates us to confront adversity and seek the best in life. To regard oneself as worthy is to have reverence for oneself as a prime mover and self-created soul.

Premise B3 states the means of achieving this regard: **one can regard oneself as worthy only by taking credit and responsibility for creating and sustaining one's character**. This is the inductive recognition, based on introspective and psychological evidence, that one's character is the most psychologically profound moral feature one possesses. A deep sense of self-worth does not arise out of nothing, but from being engaged in the project of constructing oneself, and from assessing one's fundamental moral tendencies as healthy and noble. We saw in discussing diagrams 5.3 and 5.4 that creating one's moral character is the deepest way one can shape oneself, because it means internalizing and automating one's principles as subconscious habits that color everything one does. So in creating our characters, we *take responsibility* for achieving moral worthiness in the future. To experience the esteem that follows from it, we have to *take credit* for the moral worth that our characters have actually evinced.

Premise B4 reminds us of the method of doing this, which we noted in premise 5 of diagram 5.4: **a good character is created and sustained by acting in accordance with principles**. Together, Premises B2, B3 and B4 point to **conclusion B: One needs a commitment to taking credit and responsibility for acting in accordance with principles**. This commitment is the aspect of pride that has the achievement of a sense of self-worth as its aim.

Combining conclusions A and B, we can see that the virtue of *pride is a commitment to achieve self-esteem by taking credit and responsibility for acting on one's judgment, in accordance with principles*. In effect, then, pride requires the self-conscious practice of the virtues of *rationality* (for judgment),

integrity (character), and *productiveness* (for responsibility). As a commitment to an objectively positive self-regard, as opposed to self-deception, pride also requires the practice of *honesty*. Indeed, because pride directs one to be both existentially efficacious and of good moral character, every virtue that we identify as a practical means to our long-term well-being (and thus as part of a good character, too) becomes a means which pride incorporates into the pursuit of self-esteem. Thus our need for the virtue of pride reinforces the rationale for everything we have said about rationality, integrity, productiveness, and honesty. These principles are founded on the existential requirements of living well. But once that rationale is established, it is reinforced by the spiritual need to value oneself as the life one is always in the process of creating. In this way, there are “feedback loops” among the virtues just as there are among the values.

It is important to note, however, that arguments for other virtues that derive from pride are logically dependent on the arguments we have studied in each case. One cannot say, for instance, that one’s self-esteem depends on being a person of integrity, independent of one’s need to think in principles and develop one’s moral character. Rather, given that one does have a need for a commitment to acting on principle to achieve long-term values, one can take pride in acting on principle. There is thus a general kind of “feedback” argument, which proceeds as follows: “X enhances one’s ability to live and be happy: therefore, X is a virtue. My self-esteem depends on regarding myself as competent (A3) and worthy (B3). Only by making commitments to act in ways that genuinely enhance my ability to live and be happy can I objectively regard myself as competent and worthy. Therefore, my self-esteem depends on X.” This pattern applies to the social virtues we have yet to establish, just as much as it applies the virtues we have already examined.

One has similar reasons of pride for each of the values one pursues and each of the virtues one practices. In analyzing one’s reasons, and in presenting them to others, it is crucial for the sake of clarity to recognize cases of logical dependence like this. We cannot say that *in addition* to the more fundamental arguments for the virtues, we have also this argument from pride. Rather, *given* the more fundamental arguments, we therefore have reasons of pride as well.

Aristotle described pride the *crown* of the virtues, because it calls upon each of them. This is an accurate description, and when we take credit for our accomplishments, we experience the profound psychological reward of each of our virtues. But this characterization puts all the emphasis on the retrospective view, on pride in the past. As the practice of aspiring to moral improvement in the future, pride might also be described as our *moral compass*. Pride is a compass that points to self-esteem as its goal, and that directs us to moral ambitiousness as the means of reaching it.⁵²

In moments of moral deliberation, people often bypass other considerations by relying on their pride, which means, relying on their character and

sense of self. But is this justified? Since one's reasons of pride are logically derivative, we might think it inappropriate to reach a moral decision by saying, in effect, "I'm not the kind of person who would do that," or "I need to be able to look myself in the mirror." Indeed, some critics of Objectivism criticize its practical, teleological ethic by claiming that it rules out such elevated forms of moral reasoning.

We have noted that we can distinguish between the logical fundamentality of a value, and its importance in a hierarchy of personal values. Values such as a career or romantic love are important, without being fundamental, because they provide so many more fundamental values. Similarly, we can distinguish between, on the one hand, the logical priority of various arguments in establishing virtues, and the application of our conclusions in daily moral decision making. An objective pride in one's character sums up one's moral accomplishments, which means that it sums up one's commitments to the other virtues. This is why one's pride is a moral compass that guides one in creating a happy, successful life. In one's pride, one takes stock of one's overall moral condition. When one does not have the time or a good reason to engage in more complex moral deliberation, it is therefore not only convenient, but necessary, to rely on one's sense of self as one's guide. One has to face many concrete problems that one cannot reason through in every detail, and it is entirely appropriate to handle them by asking oneself "Could I take pride in doing this?" This is just what a moral compass is for.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have surveyed the major virtues of Objectivism that apply to the individual as such, without regard for his engagement with society at large. We have noted the primacy of rationality among the virtues, and its intimate connection to honesty. We have seen that our need to act on principle and develop a good moral character, to which integrity is the means, is crucial to our grasp of the practicality of the virtues as policies of action. We have discussed the remaining two cardinal virtues of productiveness and pride, including the relative priority of productive work among our values, and the feedback relationship between all of the virtues and pride.

In chapter 6 we will apply similar methods to the exploration of the virtues of Objectivism that apply primarily in a social context.

1 Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* 1012.

2 *Ibid.* 1018–1019.

3 See e.g. Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* Book V 1129a 9–26.

4 For Rand on virtues as commitments, see “The Objectivist Ethics” 28. Our characterization of virtues as policies of acting is distinctive from, but consonant with, Rand’s various usages. Of course, a virtue may also be viewed negatively as a policy of *not acting* in ways that are incompatible with its policy of action. Honesty, for instance, is also a policy of not lying, and trade is also a policy of not defrauding.

5 This is more generally what Aristotle seems to mean by “disposition.” See Aristotle *Metaphysics* Book V 1022b 19 and 20. For a discussion of Aristotle’s conception, see for instance D.S. Hutchinson *The Virtues of Aristotle* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986) 8–11, 35–38. Rand’s substantial difference from Aristotle does not lie in the somewhat trivial point that virtues are traits of a human being, but rather in her decomposition of virtues into the three aspects of conscious recognition, goal-directed action, and freely chosen commitment.

6 Rand, “The Objectivist Ethics” 27–28.

7 It might be objected that to say that both the choice to live and the choice to think are fundamental in a certain respect is a subjectivist equivocation on the meaning of the term “fundamental.” There is nothing subjective in recognizing the relativity of fundamentality. To say that something is fundamental is to say that it explains certain features or actions better than any other thing does; it is to say that it is the cause of those effects. Thus fundamentality, while objective, depends upon what it is that one seeks to explain. In this sense fundamentality has a relative character, although not a subjective one (much as velocity has a relative character in physics). If one is seeking to characterize the ultimate ends of human action (values), the conditional nature of life is the fundamental source of them. If one is seeking to characterize the manner in which humans should act to acquire values, then what is fundamental is the basic mode and source of human action, namely reason. Thus what is in fact fundamental, depends what it is that one seeks to explain.

8 It is an open technical question whether an exhaustive categorization of “major” virtues is even possible. On the one hand, it maybe that since human nature has delimited characteristics, it is possible at some level of abstraction to exhaustively categorize the types of actions appropriate to man. It may be, for instance, that the virtue of rationality *is* that exhaustive categorization, but in a sense so abstract as to be trivial. Or, one might say that as the cardinal values universally characterize human action for values, so their correspond-

ing virtues of rationality, productiveness and pride universally characterize virtuous human action. But again, there are objections: the other major virtues we discuss in this book, such as independence and integrity, are not reducible to applications of the cardinal virtues, except insofar as they all involve the application of reason to the problem of guiding human action. One must also bear in mind that virtues are contextual, and the increase in knowledge and technology is always creating new situations. In any case, what matters in establishing virtues is that they provide significant guidance in an important aspect of life.

9 Rand, *The Fountainhead*, (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1943) New York: Signet, 195-198

10 This unprincipled approach is characteristic of many forms of consequentialism, utilitarianism, and pragmatism.

11 Rand, *The Fountainhead*, 196

12 *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology, expanded 2nd Edition*, 62.

13 This point can be observed in human development: while the mind is *tabularasa* as regards conceptual knowledge, as organisms infants are innately oriented toward their basic survival needs. They breathe and suck reflexively, and respond to sensations of pleasure and pain. This automatic awareness of benefit and harm allows the infant to attend to its parents and learn from them, to focus on meaningful facts out of the welter of details with which reality confronts it.

14 Cite on role of character in directing focus/attention? Some psychological source

15 A common debate among people discussing Objectivism revolves around John Galt's decision, in *Atlas Shrugged*, to give himself up to save Dagny Taggart from the thuggish regime's threats. Isn't this altruism? At the least, doesn't this show that Galt's own survival cannot be his ultimate value? One can view this as an instance of character at work in an unforeseen way. One gains great values of visibility, communication, emotional motivation, pleasure, and from a love to which one commits oneself whole-heartedly. Yet that very commitment may cause one to develop a character that esteems the loved one above all other things. Normally, since human interests are in harmony (as we will confirm in Chapter 6), this does not imply any sacrifice to the loved one. But in a perverse, irrational, man-made situation such as Galt's choice in the novel, one may find oneself unexpectedly committed to endangering oneself for the sake of what one loves.

Regardless of how we view Galt's fictional choice (which is fraught with symbolism and melodrama in any case, and not intended as an ethical primer), this sort of event occurs with some regularity in real life. Political leaders of the 1930s and 1940s, and indeed even everyday people in Europe, are sometimes criticized for having been too slow to react to the genocidal intentions

of the Nazi Regime. Yet it would have been out-of-character, especially for peace-loving middle-class Jews in Europe, to deal with others by means other than trade. Furthermore, the genocide actually perpetrated was so far beyond historical experience and rational expectation, that no one would have been justified in advance in developing the character of a guerrilla fighter that would have been required to combat the threat. But, thus the pathetic fact that the Nazis were able to slaughter millions with relatively little resistance.

- 16 David Kelley “The Best Within US” *IOS Journal* 3,1 and 3,2 discusses a commitment to productive work as emblematic of an orientation toward achievement.
- 17 This approach to productiveness is different from the approach offered by Peikoff in *Objectivism*, for reasons addressed in Diagram 5.6. Although it reflects themes that have circulated in Objectivist publications, as an integrated presentation this section therefore represents a higher degree of innovation than is normal in this book.
- 18 “The Objectivist Ethics” 25.
- 19 Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* 1020
- 20 The “life-cycle” pattern of earnings, savings, and expenditure has been widely studied by economists.
- 21 There is a popular myth that there is a persistent class of people whose inherited wealth allows them to live over the long term without productively managing their wealth or exerting themselves. Although inheritors who fail to manage their wealth are quite common, the effect of their actions is not to perpetuate their wealth but to extinguish it. This is why economists observe that there is little correlation of wealth within families over three generations: one generation produces wealth, the next spends what inheritance it gets, and the third is left starting back where the first began. (*cite?)
- 22 In pre-industrial societies, no more than 15% of the population ever lived by dependency or coercion. Even in the most generous welfare state, this number rarely exceeds 25%. In the context of the welfare state, virtually everyone receives some unearned subsidies or benefits, such as public education. But the number that rely on entitlements and charity, rather than earning their primary source of livelihood, is much smaller. (sources?)
- 23 Rand, “The Objectivist Ethics.” 25. Rand also discusses this idea in her *Playboy* magazine interview.
- 24 Peikoff, *Objectivism: the Philosophy of Ayn Rand* 299. For his full treatment of productiveness and purpose, see 297-302
- 25 Because it outlines an inaccurate line of argument, diagram 5.6 does not appear in the fold-out “Big Diagram.”
- 26 The need for an orderly hierarchy of values has been examined in mathematical terms in the preference theory at the root of neo-classical economics.
- 27 Peikoff, *Objectivism: the Philosophy of Ayn Rand* 299

- 28 Production, however vital, is not a value we can or should pursue at all times. There is a proper time to lay off work and rest, or engage in recreation. Of course, we might view our rest or recreation as means to improving our effectiveness in production, but that would only make sense if they were values for no other reason but that. We have not analyzed rest and recreation in any detail in this book, yet it is plain that directly increasing one's effectiveness in production is only one way in which they provide material values. Rest allows the body to heal, for instance, and recreation provides one with exercise, which makes one more healthy and robust. Furthermore, recreation is an arena devoted primarily to the experience of happiness, i.e. to fun, to the psychological experience of "this is worth living for." Thus, although rest and recreation can be direct or indirect means of achieving material values, it would be reductionist to regard them as instances of or means to production. After all, if all value-achieving action qualifies as production, then we would have to consider even the several forms of taking as attenuated forms of production.
- 29 "Playboy's Interview with Ayn Rand," 7.
- 30 In traditional, pre-industrial societies (and indeed, even today in much of the world), parents raise children for the work value children can provide and as source of material support in their old age. In capitalist society, pensions and insurance have taken over these functions.
- 31 See e.g. David Kelley "Responsibility and Happiness" *IOS Journal* 5,3 1-4,7. See also his "The Best Within Us" *IOS Journal* 3,1 and 3,2 for a presentation of the general approach to productiveness that characterizes this section.
- 32 It is true that a thing one values may be of deep primary importance to someone else. For instance, two music lovers may regard the *Brandenburg Concerti* with an equal intensity of esteem.; two hungry people may both regard a hamburger with yearning. But their primary esteem is not for each other's values *as such*, but for the particular item in question. That is, it does not matter in either of these cases that another person shares one's esteem for a thing. The music lover may enjoy Bach, and the hungry person may enjoy his burger, with equal zest regardless of whether another person tastes those delights as well.
- 33 Peikoff, *Objectivism: the Philosophy of Ayn Rand* 268
- 34 Those familiar with Leonard Peikoff's writings on truth and objectivity will notice the difference between our treatment and his. Peikoff holds essentially that truth can only obtain if reached by a rational process, and thus that arbitrary (i.e. unproven) ideas are also meaningless. He holds that the arbitrary is therefore "neither true nor false." (See his *Objectivism* 163–171) Our position on the arbitrary is more subtle and traditional in character. A statement or idea may lack meaning, because it is ungrammatical or contains words that are not symbols of concepts. Thus, "The Zeebles of Zroom are Zumptions," is

an obvious instance of a phrase that is neither true nor false because (we assure you) its words identify nothing in reality, not even fictional figures in a fictional context. Yet one could make meaningful statements without having any evidence for them, such as “There is a Greek Orthodontist in Tegucigalpa, Honduras.” If one knew nothing of orthodontists in Honduras, this proposition would certainly be arbitrary. Yet it is meaningful, and refers to a state of affairs that either does or does not exist. So some arbitrary claims are either true or false.

- 35 Nathaniel Branden makes a similar point in discussing “living consciously” in *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem* 68-72.
- 36 Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* 1019
- 37 Thanks to Eyal Mozes for suggesting this distinction.
- 38 Sir Walter Scott *Marmion* Canto VI, Stanza 17, lines 28, 29
- 39 Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*.
- 40 Generalizations from game theory have also attracted attention in philosophical circles recently. Robert Axelrod’s *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984) is a widely cited work in this area. Few philosophers appreciate the fact that Axelrod’s studies were based on the operations of simple automata (that is, computer programs) that are poor substitutes for reasoning minds. Formal game theory is a better substitute, but is still quite stylized.
- 41 Because it involves highly stylized models, game theory’s direct applicability to real world situations is usually rather limited. As with any stylized model, one must evaluate a game theory result with an eye for essential issues ignored in the abstraction, as well as those it captures well. For example, most non-cooperative game theory results, such as the famous one-shot “prisoner’s dilemma,” assume a context in which it is impossible for the actors to make binding contracts. A contract could add additional strategies and/or change the payoffs that result from existing strategies. For instance, in the “prisoner’s dilemma,” one assumes that the actors cannot agree to an additional fine for defection, one large enough to assure cooperation. On this ground alone, one should be cautious about characterizing real life situations, especially one of importance, with such a model.
- 42 In non-cooperative game theory, “Nash equilibrium” strategies are, precisely, the strategies for each player that are optimal given what the others choose.
- 43 For a discussion that combines mathematical rigor with attention to philosophical points, see e.g. Ken Binmore, *Fun and Games*. (Lexington: D.C. Heath, 1992) 355-357
- 44 Eyal Mozes made this point in correspondence.
- 45 “The Objectivist Ethics,” 27
- 46 Cite e.g. Catholic Confession of Faith (?) on Humility as a virtue.
- 47 C.S. Lewis “Mere Christianity” (Where: who, when) what page?

48 Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 1018

49 Branden, *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem* 3-25.

50 *ibid.* 5

51 Bednar and Peterson

52 As evidence of pride as the crown of our virtues, or as a moral compass for the future, we might note that in elucidating practical therapeutic principles for enhancing one's self-esteem, Nathaniel Branden effectively directs his readers to live moral lives. "The Six Pillars of Self Esteem" that Branden advocates include "living consciously" (rationality/honesty?), "self-responsibility" and "living purposefully" (productiveness?), "personal integrity," (integrity) and "self-assertiveness" (independence?).

CHAPTER 6: SOCIAL VIRTUES

Unlike many other philosophies, Objectivism holds that ethics is *not primarily* a matter of how we treat other people. A moral code — a set of values and principles about how to achieve those values — is necessary for us to live successfully. Even on the proverbial desert island, you would still need a commitment to your own life as a value and to your mind as the means of survival. You would need such virtues as rationality, productiveness, and courage — which is integrity in the face of fear or danger — for the reasons we discussed in the previous chapter. You would need the honesty to face facts, and pride in your achievements and moral character. Indeed, you would need these virtues even more than you do now, since there is no way for a Robinson Crusoe to coast, even temporarily, on someone else's efforts.

However, we do not live on desert islands. Virtually everything we do involves some interaction with people at some level. Our parents created and nurtured us; previous generations provided us with the knowledge with which we were educated. As adults, we may create families of our own. We spend most of our recreation time enjoying conversation and competition *with* others, or performances and entertainments created *by* others. There is no activity more social than romantic love; the pleasure and intimate visibility it brings are some of the most profound personal values one can experience. And of course we work with others, as cooperating individuals to be sure, but nevertheless as beneficiaries of the division of labor in the marketplace and teamwork inside the firm. When we earn money, it has value because others will honor it. When we invest money, we invest in banks, funds and companies that are staffed and/or operated by others, and that depend on others for customers.

Because social interaction is a pervasive and important part of our lives, we need ethical principles that especially address it. This is the topic to which we turn in this chapter: the social philosophy of Objectivism. Based on our social philosophy, we will also need to determine what political principles, if any, are appropriate for the organization of society as a whole. The difference between social and political philosophy is that the first concerns the principles each of us should use in dealing with others, while the second concerns the proper relationship between the individual and the government — including the question of whether there should be a government at all. We will take up the Objectivist political philosophy in Chapter 7.

The Trader Principle is the essence of the Objectivist social ethics. This is the principle that we should live together as independent producers, voluntarily trading value for value in every aspect of our social lives, neither giving nor demanding the unearned. It is a code for gaining social values in the

most fruitful and practical manner, consonant with our basic human nature. Its basis is the virtues of rationality, integrity, productiveness, honesty, and pride that we discussed last chapter, but it enriches our understanding of each of these virtues.

In this chapter, we will begin with our basic cognitive orientation toward society. First, we will discuss how others should affect our thinking: this is the virtue of *cognitive independence* (Diagram 6.1), or autonomy of thought. Next, we will discuss how we should evaluate others: this concerns the virtue of *justice* (Diagram 6.2) and our need to engage in *moral judgment* (Diagram 6.3). We will then turn to the Trader Principle itself (Diagram 6.7), which depends on three negative principles of social interaction: *non-sacrifice* (Diagram 6.4), *existential independence* (Diagram 6.5), and *non-coercion* (Diagram 6.6). The chapter concludes with a discussion of *benevolence* (Diagram 6.8), which is the virtue of treating others as potential partners in trade.

Autonomy: Cognitive Independence

We have seen that the choice to think is the root of our volition, and that reason, as our means of gaining and applying knowledge, is our primary means of survival. So when we turn to considering how we should act in relation to others, the most basic question we can ask is: how should our thoughts relate to those of others? How does our knowledge compare to the knowledge claimed by others?

Ayn Rand's art and thought were thoroughly and consistently devoted to defending the individual against the claims of the collective. There are many values to be gained in society, but, as she emphasized, to truly gain and enjoy them one must be an individual in one's own right. As Rand so succinctly put it: "To say 'I love you,' one must know first how to say the 'I.'" ¹ For each of us, standing up for our individuality begins when we make the commitment to rely on our own minds and efforts. This is the virtue of Independence, and the root of independence is the independence of one's mind.

The converse of independence is dependence, but dependence comes in two basic kinds. There is *existential dependence*, which is relying on other people to provide for one's needs. This is dependence in the sense we touched on in Diagram 5.5. A person who is existentially dependent is a moocher, and lives his life at the mercy of the charity and production of others. Of course, one can mooch spiritual and social values as well, as when one seeks praise without merit. As we will see when we discuss the negative elements of the trader principle, existential dependence amounts to a failure to take responsibility for one's basic needs.

The second and more fundamental kind of dependence is *cognitive dependence*, which amounts to relying on others to do one's thinking and make

one's decisions. In *The Fountainhead*, the character Peter Keating stands as an example of someone who is mentally dependent. Keating isn't a welfare bum or thief: he studies to get good grades and works for a living. But he doesn't think for himself. He lets the expectations of others, such as his mother and his boss, determine his own values and choices, and he relies on the talents of others, such as the hero Howard Roark, when he needs to create something innovative or solve a difficult problem. As a result, he turns out to be hollow inside; a person who has lived the life others expected, and has thought what he believed others thought, rather than living for his own happiness by the efforts of his own mind.

The virtue of independence is the commitment to acting on the basis of one's own grasp of reality and choice of goals, and relying on one's own effort to achieve them. Independence has two elements, each a rejection of one of the two aspects of dependence. The second of these two elements, relying on one's own effort, primarily concerns one's existential relationship to others. We will examine this element in diagram 6.5, as an aspect of living by the Trader Principle.

Here we turn our attention to the first element of independence, which is a commitment to *autonomy*, i.e., to thinking for oneself.² As we will see, cognitive independence is required if one is to live in society as an individual, and not stumble along as a conformist member of a herd.

This is not obvious, however. What is wrong with living as the member of a herd? It's a normal mode of survival for many animals, and after all, there are usually people smarter, wiser and more knowledgeable than oneself. Perhaps one should make a virtue of deferring to professionals, pundits and gurus.³ Many critics of individualism argue that the popular heroic image of the independent thinker is a myth. How can one think for oneself, when one's thoughts are shaped by the language one is taught, by what one learns in school, by the wisdom of one's elders? Perhaps the best one can do is recognize one's limitations and conform faithfully to the instruction and guidance of those who merit a place as moral and intellectual leaders.

Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Catholic Society of Jesus —the Jesuits— espoused such a view. As a Catholic, Loyola preached salvation through total obedience to God and God's agents on earth. His order attracted men of unusual intelligence and ability, but they had to undergo an exceptionally long period of training during which the habit of total obedience was instilled in them. The rationale for this, according to historian Paul Johnson, was:

The assurance we have that in obeying we can commit no fault... you are certain you commit no fault as long as you obey, because God will only ask you if you have duly performed what orders you have received.⁴

If the purity of one's soul were the highest good, as Catholicism teaches, then this would be a workable ethic: As long as one intended to do right, some-

one else could define what the right thing to do was. If that pundit made a mistake, one would still have made none oneself. But in real life, we have to live with and pay for the results of our actions, regardless of who makes the final decision behind them. So we have every reason not to act on a mistake, whether our own or that of another person.

Diagram 6.1 shows why avoiding mistakes, i.e. maintaining objectivity, entails the need for cognitive independence. **Premise 1** expresses the basic normative premise of the diagram: **one needs to act on the basis of reason**. This is simply a summary of the facts about our need for reason that we have surveyed in Chapters 3, 4, and 5. It is the recognition that reason is our primary means of survival, because it is our means to conceptual knowledge. The premise emphasizes that we need to act on the knowledge that we gain by reason. Reason is thus a practical necessity.

But why should we have more confidence in our *own* reason than that of someone else? After all, no one is infallible, and there may be other people who are smarter and more competent than we are. Perhaps it is simply prudent to let others think for us. Aristotle, the father of logic, seemed to agree with this view. According to many modern interpreters, he held that in addition to what one learns by one's own reason, one's knowledge depends fundamentally on teachings handed down by the wise and worthy.⁵ To see what is mistaken in this view, we must consider how one reaches knowledge through a process of reasoning.

Premise 2a reminds us that **reason is volitional and contextual**. In diagram 1.5 (Reason and Objectivity) we noted that these facts give us grounds to conclude that one's reasoning process must be objective if it is to result in knowledge. So we can infer from Premise 2a that **reason is a reliable guide to action only insofar as it is objective (Premise 2)**.

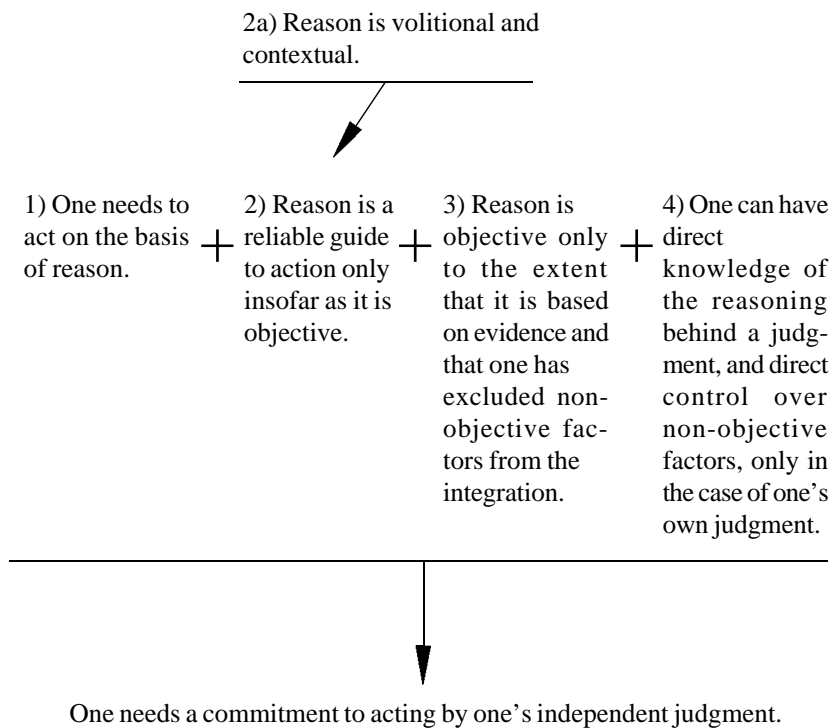
But what do we have to do to make sure that reason is objective? As we saw in diagram 1.5, to reliably reach abstract conclusions that are true, we have to make sure that no biased or subjective factors have distorted our reasoning and that our conclusions are properly derived from the data of perception. **Premise 3** restates this familiar point: **Reason is objective only to the extent that it is based on evidence and one has excluded nonobjective factors from the integration**.

Premise 4 brings out the key aspect of reason that makes autonomy an important virtue. This is the fact that **one can have direct knowledge of the reasoning behind a judgment, and direct control over non-objective factors, only in the case of one's own judgment**. In other words, only in one's own mind can one actually grasp the thinking that lies behind a conclusion. The only way to attain that grasp is by thinking the conclusion through for oneself, weighing the evidence, considering alternatives, checking the logic, and so on. Contrary to Aristotle (or some of his modern interpreters), this means that it is

wrong to regard the ideas that we learn from authorities as knowledge on a par with the knowledge that we have personally grounded in our own perception of reality. At best, we might say that we *expect to be able* to confirm the claims of respected authorities, because we have independent reasons to regard them as tending to be reliable. But only a process of our own reason can actually establish the truth or falsity of their claims, to our own understanding. In the final analysis, each of us grasps reality on his own.

DIAGRAM 6.1: Cognitive Independence

Inductive Evidence:
 3: Introspection, psychology, neuroscience



The evidence for this is primarily introspective. We all are aware of the fact that we don't have direct access to other people's mental processes. We can all tell the difference between reasoning out a conclusion in our own minds, and thereby being assured of its soundness, as opposed to our ignorance on that score when we hear it from someone else. Indeed, often it is difficult enough to simply understand what the other person's conclusion *is*, to say nothing of what led to it, since many people have a hard time simply expressing their ideas clearly! The fact expressed in premise 3 is also the basis for the canons of scientific inference, which are designed to establish the truth of an idea with reference to one's own verifiable experience.

Together, Premises 1, 2, 3, and 4 provide us with the essential rationale for **autonomy**: since one does not have direct control over the objectivity of anyone's judgment other than one's own, **one needs a commitment to acting by one's independent judgment**. Notice that this rationale is essentially the same as the one we used in diagram 1.6 to explain why emotions are not means of cognition: with our emotions, as with the judgments of others, we are not in control of the process. Blindly following the orders of another is just like blindly acting on an emotion. In the first case one is a slave to another's opinion, and in the second, a slave to one's passions. So a conservative Peter Keating-type of conformist and a "liberated" emotionalist nonconformist are brothers under the skin.

There is direct evidence of our need for autonomy in many quarters. One extremely significant example comes from the history of science. The medieval scholastic philosophers held the argument from authority to stand on a par with the evidence of the senses.⁶ Modern natural philosophy, led by figures like Sir Francis Bacon, rejected the argument from authority, and made empirical confirmation the only standard of scientific proof. This commitment to the method of cognitive independence resulted in the scientific and industrial revolutions that have radically transformed the relationship between man and nature, and enriched and empowered billions of people.

In normal life, however, inside the grand sweep of history, we seem to depend on the judgment of others all the time. We pay professional experts to manage our money, design our buildings, fight our lawsuits, provide us with psychological counseling, and so on. In a sense, we hire financiers, architects, lawyers, psychologists and other experts to think for us. In addition, there are the instructional books, histories, atlases and almanacs we all rely upon for reliable information and guidance. Indeed, the advanced modern economy depends fundamentally on such a mental division of labor. The abstract argument for autonomy in Diagram 6.1 seems sound, but all this evidence appears to contradict it. To see that this contradiction is a matter of appearance rather than fact, we need to consider the nature of our intellectual exchanges with others in more detail.

When we obtain information from others, we do so in two forms. The first form, common in schools, is instruction in a method, or a guided introduction to a body of knowledge. In a biology class, for example, the instructor uses his knowledge, and the knowledge of text-book authors, lab designers, and so on, to efficiently demonstrate the nature of living organisms to his students. The students' knowledge at the end of the course is first-hand, yet it is more than they could have acquired on their own. So long as the students do not fully accept claims of their teachers which they have not established for themselves, this type of information exchange is fully consonant with cognitive independence.

We also obtain information as a product. For example, when we read a news report, refer to a reference volume, or follow the instructions on a box of pills, we effectively employ that information as knowledge of our own. This allows us to enjoy the information-gathering and processing services of millions of people, and vastly expands the range of information available to us. However, there is a danger in relying on others in this way, and one must take care not to *equate* the statements of others with one's own first-hand knowledge. In most cases, we obtain the information through a contract, as when we buy medicine. The information is then an economic good, and we reasonably expect it to be dependable because, as we will see when we discuss existential independence, it is in the self-interest of the providers to offer a reliable product. More generally, we should employ information from others only when we have strong reasons of our own to think it dependable. Does the medicine perform as expected? When we read a history, does the author cite a wide range of primary sources? Do independent sources of the news report similar information?

Practicing cognitive independence naturally involves the other virtues of cognition. As a matter of rationality, it means we should integrate the information we get from others with knowledge we can confirm ourselves. As a matter of honesty, cognitive independence means being aware of which information we use in relative ignorance, and which we use with objective certainty of its truth. We should always bear in mind that no claim by others is worth more than our first-hand knowledge of the truth, and so we should always be willing to rely on our own judgment in the final analysis, assuming we have sufficient information to reach a rational conclusion.

Because we have to discover our values and virtues, the argument in diagram 6.1 applies to our choices of goals and aspirations as much as it does to scientific knowledge. So the argument for cognitive independence implies that we are doubly autonomous beings in the moral realm. As we saw in Chapter 2, we are moral ends-in-ourselves because each of us is his own ultimate value. But because we can have confidence only in values that we choose by our own judgment, we are morally autonomous in fleshing out the hierarchy of values by

which we pursue our own happiness in life. Cognitive independence thus reconfirms our need to hold purpose as a cardinal value, and the importance of taking pride in our unique, individually-authored values and character.

Cognitive independence is a defensive virtue. It is the practice of upholding the primacy of one's own grasp of reality and choice of actions, as against the emotional pressure, group influence, and intellectual authority of others. Upholding one's autonomy in this way is essential to living a rational life in society. It is also vital to the virtue of pride. One can objectively take credit for acting on one's judgment only if one ensures that one acted for reasons of one's own.

But to obtain the values one needs from social life, one needs more than a defense. One needs to employ one's reason to the positive task of identifying sources of value in the social realm, and one needs to act in such a way as to obtain social values. The first step in positively engaging society consists in judging the potential of others to be sources of benefit or harm. This is the practice of justice, the subject to which we now turn:

Justice

To achieve one's own values in society, one must constantly evaluate other people. Justice is the virtue of doing so objectively; it is the virtue of rationality applied to the realm of social values. Just as one needs in the broader context of nature to attend to the significance of things, one needs to attend to the significance of people. One needs principles of evaluation specific to human beings because, fundamentally, human actions are self-directed and arise from free will. This means not merely that one is bound to wander into the complex realms of psychology and economics if one wants to identify the causes of human action, but that human actions are the products of choice, and thus are subject to change and to moral evaluation.⁷ Natural events merely are; human actions are good or evil.

Justice is a commitment to evaluating people objectively and to acting accordingly to apply that evaluation. As Ayn Rand put it:

Justice is the recognition of the fact that you cannot fake the character of men as you cannot fake the character of nature, that you must judge all men as conscientiously as you judge inanimate objects, with the same respect for truth, with the same incorruptible vision, by as pure and as *rational* a process of identification...⁸

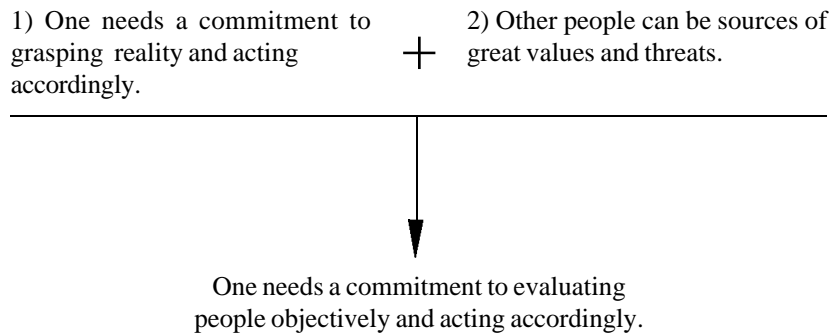
Usually, evaluating others amounts to performing a cursory judgment as to whether a person is worth further consideration, or whether he appears reasonable. Sometimes, it can mean identifying and evaluating a person's deepest motives and character. In either case, we also need to know how we should

act on the basis of our evaluation. All these are elements of justice.

Diagram 6.2 summarizes the argument for justice in the most general sense, as the application of rationality to social facts.

Diagram 6.2: Justice and Rationality

Inductive evidence: 2) History, economics, psychology, personal experience, etc.



Premise 1 restates the conclusion of diagram 5.1: **one needs a commitment to grasping reality and acting accordingly**. In other words, one needs to employ reason in identifying and acting to gain values. This is the virtue of rationality.

Premise 2 states that **other people can be sources of great values and threats**. This inductive claim needs little argument: industrial civilization, knowledge, the division of labor, the family, love, law, crime, and war are all evidence of the vast impact that others can and do have on our lives. Note that by “threats” we mean any form of disvalue, from personal qualities such as incompetence and boorishness, to harmful practices such as coercion or the advocacy of irrational ideas. One encounters a young man with an interest in architecture: he might be a Frank Lloyd Wright, or an Adolph Hitler (of course, he is more likely to turn out to be someone less notable).

Premises 1 and 2 allow us to infer the **conclusion** that **one needs a commitment to evaluating people objectively and acting accordingly**. An evaluation is an assessment of the value-significance of something or someone. As such, it is a kind of objective identification. An evaluation is based on the

identification of the facts of a person's identity that bear on his value to one, and of the facts about oneself, such as one's needs, that determine that value.

Diagram 6.2 gives the broadest argument for the virtue of justice, one that might appear completely uncontroversial. Who except an open irrationalist could deny that one needs to evaluate other people objectively? Yet as we shall see, this straightforward principle has remarkable implications when we consider the facts of human nature and social existence in more detail. In traditional formulations of the virtue of justice, one's rational judgment of others has often been subordinated to altruism, in the form of doctrines such as mercy and egalitarianism. In fact, as we shall see, these are not aspects of objective justice at all.

To flesh out the Objectivist conception of justice, we will need to consider two essential applications of it: moral judgment and the principle of trade. In effect, this task will require much of the next two chapters, but a brief survey here, in contrast to antithetical conceptions of justice, will prepare you for the road ahead:

1. Moral Judgment:

Evaluating the moral character of others is a central aspect of justice, as is acting on that judgment to encourage sources of value and discourage threats. As we will see, this can be a complex process, but it involves three basic stages. First, one must identify the facts that are to be evaluated. This is a matter of objectivity, and its antithesis is the epistemological doctrine of skepticism. To evaluate the facts, one must identify their moral significance, distinguishing right from wrong and good from evil. We establish the moral significance of an act by relating it to universal ethical standards. The antithesis of moral evaluation is moral relativism, the view that there are no universal standards of right and wrong.

Finally, one must apply one's moral judgment. This process is opposed by those who espouse the doctrine of mercy, which is the gratuitous forgiveness of what one recognizes as a moral fault. The view that justice must be tempered by mercy in its application is in fact antithetical to justice. Mercy often has its root in a kind of moral skepticism, since it is predicated on the view that rational judgment is inherently biased or unjust.

One important way in which one acts on a moral judgment is by expressing one's moral sanction. Because a person's self-esteem depends on knowing himself to be morally worthy, the praise of the good and condemnation of the evil can be a powerful means of directing others toward the right kinds of actions. The application of moral sanction in favor of the good has its own antithesis: the nihilistic envy that Ayn Rand described as "the hatred of the good for being the good."⁹ This is the perverse application of moral sanction to destroy the able, the beautiful, and the successful.

2. The Principle of Trade:

Moral judgment provides us with an evaluation based on the universal principles of morality. It is a component of justice because it is an important means to identifying values in the social realm. But justice is broader than moral justice; it is the evaluation of the value-potential of others in relation to our particular lives and purposes. It is the facts identified by the trader principle that provide us with the broadest principles of evaluation and corresponding action.

Justice is to society as rationality is to reality in general. It consists in identifying the facts about people and their actions, and evaluating them in terms of their effect on one's life. This means rating people and their actions based on one's own hierarchy of values. For example, in choosing between two brands of detergent, one will find no grounds for comparison in terms of moral worth; one must choose in terms of how well the two products will serve one's own needs and circumstances.

Treating a person according to one's evaluation of them presupposes that we have some standards of how to deal with people. These standards would include: what values are to be achieved through interaction and what principles have been established that relate a person's traits to various actions. To form such standards, one must answer the question: "What does one person deserve from another?"

Different moral codes provide different answers to this question. Altruists say that people deserve our "unselfish" help and so justice requires that we give it to them. Egalitarians add that no one deserves help any more than anyone else, so "social justice" entails that we should all be equal in all respects. An aristocratic ethics, on the other hand, holds that people deserve different privileges and duties in life on the basis of their family background.

The trader principle is Objectivism's answer to what people deserve:

- People deserve to be dealt with voluntarily.
- People deserve to receive value in exchange for values they provide.

In other words, people deserve to be dealt with by trade, and appraised in terms of what they can offer as trading partners.

We will validate trade as the standard of justice and explore its significance for social morality and politics over the course of this chapter and Chapter 7. But before we turn to the trader principle, we will begin our exploration of the ramifications and applications of the virtue of justice by examining need to perform moral judgment. In Diagram 6.3 we will see why the facts of character require objective evaluation in terms of universal moral principles, and how we can apply our moral judgments in ways that add to the values we can gain from others.

Moral Judgment

Ayn Rand wrote that one's attitude toward justice should be "*Judge, and be prepared to be judged.*" She meant by this that moral judgment is a necessary aspect of life, and that the reasons why others deserve to be evaluated morally apply just as clearly to oneself as to them. She remarked that moral judgment is not to be undertaken lightly: "It is a task that requires the most precise, the most exacting, the most ruthlessly objective and *rational* process of thought."¹⁰

A moral judgment is an evaluation of a person's moral character. This is a key aspect of justice because, as we saw in Diagram 5.3, one's character is the sum of one's virtues and vices. It is a person's character that is the greatest indication of how he will behave in the future, and is the greatest explanation of how he has tended to behave in the past. Diagram 6.3 lays out the key points in this argument:

Premise 1a restates the conclusion of Diagram 6.2: **one needs a commitment to evaluating people objectively and acting accordingly.** Acting in accordance with one's evaluation of others means dealing with them in certain ways and not in others. In this diagram, we will determine more specific principles concerning one way in which one should evaluate others, and the ways in which one should treat them accordingly.

The first step is recognizing that the broad principle of justice (Premise 1a) has the direct implication that **one needs to treat other people in accordance with one's assessment of their potential value or disvalue.** This is **Premise 1.** What fundamentally affects a person's potential to be a source of value or a threat? Intelligence, skill, and charisma are characteristics that make people more valuable to others either in themselves, or through their ability to produce values. But these characteristics affect the *degree* to which people can offer value, not the fact that they are likely to provide a benefit rather than a create a threat. What shapes whether a person uses his in-born talents in productive and healthy ways, rather than destructive ways?

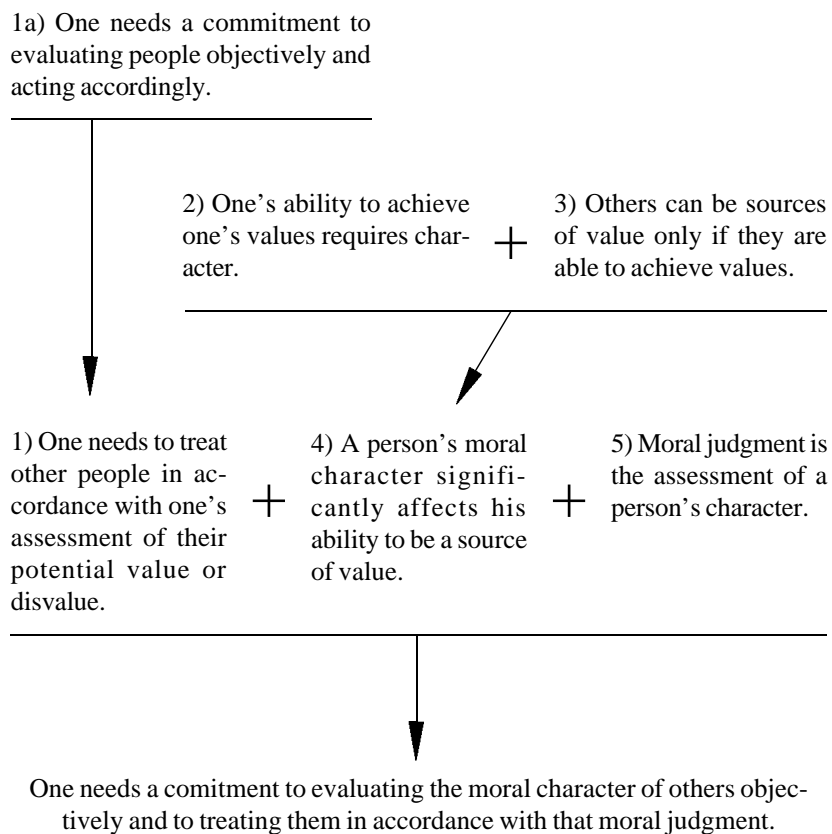
In our discussion of integrity in Chapter 5, we observed that one's moral character provides one with subconscious direction toward fundamental facts and long-term values. One's dispositions towards virtue or vice are character traits. **Premise 2** restates the conclusion of diagram 5.3 in slightly altered terms: **To achieve values, one needs a good moral character.** As diagram 5.3 shows, a good moral character is composed of traits that we need if we are to be successful in creating and maintaining values, and thus securing our own, long-term well-being.

In discussing ethics, one can easily make the mistake of assuming that because we have identified someone as good for himself, we can therefore directly infer that he is good for us. This fallacy is a legacy of intrinsic concep-

tions of the good.¹¹ The Objectivist ethics is egoistic, and holds that good is objective relative to each person as a moral end-in-himself. So when we say that someone is of good moral character, Objectivists primarily mean that he possesses the automated awareness of *his* long-term values, not ours, and that his character traits are conducive to *his* well-being, not ours. It is an additional step, a step we take here in premise 3, to establish that the qualities that make a person good for himself, also make him good for us.

Diagram 6.3: Moral Judgment

Inductive evidence: 3) human nature, ethics 5) introspection, ethics, law



Premise 3 states that **others can be sources of value only if they are able to achieve values**. The entire Objectivist ethics, including the virtues we have validated thus far, is a set of principles to guide a person in pursuit of values. As we have noted, production is our primary means of achieving material values. The virtues that we have established so far are the practices that are required if one is to apply one's reason to living by production. The character traits required to produce values for oneself are the traits required to produce values that others can enjoy as well. Indeed, since we share a common human nature and therefore have many similar basic needs, many of the goods one might produce for oneself, such as food, shelter, clothing, art and so on, are also valuable to others. We have seen that productive work is vital because it is our means to providing for our most basic, material needs, and our means of creating wealth in trade with others. Consider the fact that the values we receive from others are wealth, knowledge and the values of character that provide visibility. Of these, the spiritual values of knowledge and character *cannot* be acquired except by creating them in oneself, by learning and self-development. The only significant value that one *can* acquire without creating it is wealth, which can be taken by force or received as a gift. Yet no value is more amenable to production than wealth, as the ongoing development of capitalism daily attests. From this inductive survey, we can observe that to reliably have values to offer to others, one must be fundamentally capable of creating the values one needs for oneself, especially by means of production. The only open question is whether a moocher or a thief could also be a significant source of values. We will address this issue shortly: Diagrams 6.5 and 6.6 show why existential dependence and coercion are not reliable means to values.

On the basis of this inductive evidence, we have reason to accept premise 3. It is profoundly important, because it identifies that fact that in pursuing our own benefit, we make ourselves potentially beneficial to others as well. It is this insight that lies at the root of Ayn Rand's observation that there exists a harmony of interests among rational people.

Together, premises 2 and 3 imply that **a person's moral character significantly affects his ability to be a source of value**.¹² This is the intermediate conclusion expressed in **Premise 4**. This does not mean that only moral paragons are sources of value. But the morality we are describing here is a *practical* morality: people who are successful in practical terms are people who tend to act virtuously, at least in the aspects of their lives in which they are most effective.¹³ So we expect that in the normal course of events people will be greater sources of value to the extent that they are more consistently rational in their pursuit of values.

Premise 5 defines moral judgment: **moral judgment is the assessment of a person's character**. Moral judgment is a species of evaluation. Aristotle held that moral judgment was distinguished from other forms of evalu-

ation by the fact that it involves assessing praise or blame.¹⁴ Certainly, moral praise and blame are tightly connected with moral judgment. People are touchy about moral praise and blame, because their self-esteem is affected by their sense of their moral character (for reasons we noted in diagram 5.10). This is why, as we will see shortly, one's moral sanction has significant effects on the behavior of others. However, morality has a more direct significance for human life than its effect on self-esteem. It is the direct import of morality for life that both explains the power of praise and blame, and distinguishes moral judgment from other forms of evaluation. The *essential* distinguishing trait of moral judgment is the object to which it is directed: a) *voluntary* action and character traits that are b) either for life—good— or inimical to it—evil. Its connection to praise and blame is a consequence of this.¹⁵

Together, premises 1, 4, and 5 give us the **conclusion** of Diagram 6.3: **one needs a commitment to evaluating the moral character of others objectively and to treating them in accordance with that moral judgment.** The commitment to moral judgment is thus a more specific version of the broad commitment to justice. It is a commitment to the method of moral judgment one must use in practicing justice.

Moral judgment is a principle for pursuing values in the social realm. As such, it should be an activity that serves one's own needs, and never a duty or an a-contextual injunction. Justice does not require that one plumb the moral depths of every person one encounters. There are far too many people — and establishing the facts of someone's character takes too much time — for us to be able to reach judgments about the characters of most of the people with whom we interact. In fact, moral judgment is the most complex and demanding form of evaluation within justice. For this reason one should be cautious about reaching judgments about the overall character of others when one lacks sufficient information to justify one's conclusion.¹⁶

Although one should be cautious about pronouncing sweeping moral judgments, one does need to form clear, if somewhat provisional, judgments of the people one deals with on a normal basis. The basis for such judgments should naturally be the facts that are relevant to one's relationship with the other person. For example, the personal life of one's banker may not be relevant to how well he handles one's savings: because of this it is certainly not an aspect of prudent justice to dig into his privacy or jump to unwarranted conclusions about his character as a lover. But it is a vital necessity that one have good reasons to think he is of a rational, dependable, honest character in his financial dealings. Usually, one can reach a reasonable judgment in such cases based on his manner, reputation, track record, ideas and so on. So, applying moral judgment *appropriately* to an impersonal relationship does not usually imply any need for exceptional investigations.

Because moral judgment can be complex, one needs to be sensitive to

the subtleties involved in objectively identifying and evaluating morally relevant facts about others. *Objectivity* in evaluating others is essential to justice, but it is not always easy to maintain. For example, we most need a deep understanding of the moral characters of the people we are closest to: our colleagues, family members, friends, and lovers. But these are the people toward whom we feel the strongest emotions, and about whom we are most tempted to reach hasty judgments, or whom we may tend to exempt from judgment altogether.

The rationale in Diagram 6.3 reminds us that we depend on the good moral character of our close associates for the values we get from them. Of course, the diagram speaks of values quite abstractly; we don't usually think of our friends' *rationality* as their paramount characteristic, for instance. We may *like* them for their ideas, manners, wit, skill, charm, background, and so on. But we best appreciate these values in those whom we *respect*. Their good moral character is the basis of that respect: we don't notice our friends' reasonable natures, for instance, but we do notice when they are unreasonable. We don't say: "Jane is my friend because she's productive," but we realize on reflection that if Jane weren't productive, the qualities that make her a dear friend would count for little. An amusing scoundrel is amusing only in the short-run, but is a scoundrel for the long haul.

So we need to judge the moral character of our close associates, but especially in these cases we need to resist the temptation to reach judgments based on emotion, and base our conclusions on objective reasoning from facts. Our need to practice moral judgment thus reinforces our need for honesty and rationality in thinking about those closest to us.

Objectively evaluating others may mean restraining oneself from hasty condemnation, or it may mean holding to a rational judgment in the face of a reflexive inclination to sympathy. This is the "temperament of a judge" that is essential to the rational evaluation of others.¹⁷

It is this commitment to rational, moral judgment that puts true justice at odds with the traditional exaltation of mercy and forgiveness. "To err is human, to forgive is divine,"¹⁸ goes the traditional saying, implying that mercy is fundamentally just, regardless of context. By contrast, objectivity consists in withholding one's forgiveness where it has not been earned. A sign in a small store, meant to notify customers of the store's policy on accepting personal checks, put this point well: "To err is human, to forgive is \$20." In truth nothing is divine, and living as a rational being means holding to one's well-founded and well-thought-out judgments. Whether one is considering the character of a family member, that of a friend, or simply that of an associate at work with whom one has a disagreement over a practical matter, it is essential to restrain oneself from haste in condemnation or forgiveness, but nevertheless follow through conscientiously on the conclusions of one's reason.

So far we have discussed forming moral judgments. But the purpose of

forming judgments is to employ them to encourage others to be sources of value, and to discourage threats. This is what acting appropriately in accordance with our moral judgment amounts to. In cases of legal justice, this may entail applying appropriate fines and punishments. More generally, one applies one's judgments of others in the form of one's *sanction*. To sanction someone is to support or encourage him.

Ayn Rand argued that evil, since it is based in irrational behavior, is impotent in itself. To be effective, it requires the cooperation of the good in people, that is, their rationality, productiveness and integrity. Nazi Germany offered an extreme case of this kind: the Nazis gained the cooperation of the talents of industrial capitalism in advancing their tribalist, anti-industrial, genocidal imperialism. One can observe this phenomenon in less extreme forms: business firms endow university chairs for professors who treat capitalism with contempt; middle-class individuals who aspire to prosperity contribute money to environmental activists who idealize the destruction of industrial civilization. Ayn Rand called this phenomenon "the sanction of the victim."¹⁹ The Objectivist conception of justice does not require such sacrifices. It emphasizes the need to reject them.

One can encourage or discourage others on the basis of our moral judgment by offering or withholding two fundamental kinds of support: *moral sanction* and *existential aid*.²⁰

- *Moral Sanction*

Moral sanction is the recognition of a person as good and commendable. It is primarily expressed through open praise of the good and condemnation of the evil, but one's sanction can also take the form of a passive acceptance of irrationality and injustice. Expressing one's moral sanction to others draws their attention to morally significant facts. Value-significance is rarely obvious: by expressing moral sanction, one can help others grasp connections between facts and their own values that they themselves may have overlooked. For instance, when one praises a businessperson as a creator of value, one draws attention to the essential productive nature of a business enterprise and its similarity to other, more well-esteemed forms of production, such as scholarship and artistic creation. By raising the moral awareness of others in this way, one helps to create a moral atmosphere that reflects one's moral code and a society that is more conducive to one's own life.

Withholding moral sanction, when sanction is expected, can make an injustice more evident to others. The civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s, with its condemnation and disobedience of unjust laws, demonstrated this principle clearly. A negative instance, which Ayn Rand often wrote and spoke on, is the failure of the productive people in society to stand up for their own basic moral claim to their earnings and property. Their conferral of moral sanc-

tion on their expropriators has reinforced the diminution of property and contract rights in this century.

Moral sanction is important because of the key role morality plays in human life. As we saw in Chapter 4 when we discussed the value of philosophy, we need morality to guide our lives. As we saw in discussing pride, one further needs a sense of self-worth based in thinking of oneself as a person of high moral character. Explicit statements of moral sanction or condemnation appeal to this sense in people, to their profound need and respect for good moral behavior. Most people are not philosophers: they do not normally analyze the technical merits of their moral beliefs. Such people are especially sensitive to direct moral appeals, because they are aware of moral claims as representing something extremely serious and universal. When one praises the good or condemns the evil, one communicates strongly to others one's sense of the rightness or wrongness of the subject of one's judgment.

- *Existential Aid*

Existential aid is the material counterpart of moral sanction. Whenever one purchases a product or contributes to an organization, one gives the producer or organization in question the means to further action, in the form of financial support. Whereas moral sanction directly affects others' ideas, existential aid directly affects their material well-being. Withholding existential aid, for instance by boycott, is a time-honored means of denying aid to evil. We can also observe the effects of existential aid in the market process of economic competition. Purchasers who seek the most value for their money encourage producers to provide good products and charge low prices. So we can see that providing existential aid is an effective means of encouraging others to provide one with values, and withholding it discourages activities one does not care to endorse.

Although moral sanction and existential aid are related, they are not identical. To buy someone's product, for example, is to offer a kind of implicit moral endorsement, but only of the product, not of the producer and all his aims. One may purchase a pizza, for example, at a competitive price from a company that is owned by an activist for religion. The pizza purchase is just a pizza purchase. Barring further endorsement, one could not properly be construed as endorsing the philosophical aims of the owner.

In general, one's explicit moral sanction, or passive acceptance of explicit injustice, expresses one's judgment over the character of other people and social institutions. Conferring existential aid on others should be taken as offering implicit moral sanction in correspondence to the degree of one's interaction. To contribute to an activist organization is to confer one's moral sanction and to aid their general endeavors. As we've seen, to buy a competitive product from someone with activist intentions, on the other hand, is simply to endorse

the product both existentially and morally. In such cases one must weigh the extent of one's indirect contribution to a cause one opposes, against the direct benefit that the product offers.

As we noted earlier, Justice also concerns the criteria one employs for determining worthiness or merit. It concerns issues such as what is one's due, and what others deserve from one, both as a general matter and in the particular instance. In Objectivism, one is considered to deserve what one has earned by one's own ability, skill and effort. This conception of desert is based on trade as the morally proper mode of interaction, the topic to which we now turn.

The Trader Principle

The core principle of the Objectivist social ethics is the principle of trade. It has been implicit in our conceptions of independence, honesty and justice. It provides the missing premise in our argument for production as man's proper mode of survival, and completes our understanding of what responsibility for achieving our values entails. Ayn Rand expressed its essentiality this way:

The Principle of Trade is the only rational ethical principle for all human relationships, personal and social, private and public, spiritual and material. It is the principle of justice. A trader is a man who earns what he gets and does not give or take the undeserved. He does not treat men as masters or slaves, but as independent equals. He deals with men by means of a free, voluntary, uncoerced exchange — an exchange which benefits both parties by their own independent judgment.²¹

In *The Fountainhead*, Rand explored the meaning of the trader principle at the personal level. Roark is the independent man and is contrasted with the other major protagonists, all of whom are dependents in one way or another. Roark is a trader in all realms. He takes it for granted that he himself must be the fountainhead of his own values. He refuses to work for others on terms unacceptable to him. He refuses to let others support him without giving value in return. He especially does not give the values of spirit — love, friendship, esteem, recognition, and so on — except to those people whom he values.

In *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand explored the meaning of the trader principle at the social level, contrasting it with the principle of power as two different ways for human beings to interact. The middle section of the book is entitled "Either/Or," and among the stark alternatives it poses is the contrast between those who deal by trade and those who deal by power. At a party where two of the corrupt businessmen, Orren Boyle and James Taggart, are jockeying for

power over each other, Boyle says to Taggart: “..one’s got to trade something. If we don’t trade money — and the age of money is past — then we trade men.”²²

But bargaining over power is antithetical to the essential nature of trade.

Trade is voluntary interaction to mutual benefit. We see it paradigmatically in cases of economic exchange, where one person offers a good (usually money) in exchange for some other good. In business, it is presumed that all trade is to mutual benefit, because businesses are unable to force their customers to purchase their products, and private businesses normally have the explicit goal of making a profit.

Rand’s use of the concept of “trade” extends beyond the traditional sense of trade as economic exchange. It applies to any sort of interaction between people. For example: one can communicate with someone else without money changing hands, and without any explicit *quid-pro-quo*. Communication provides us with the great benefit of expanding our knowledge, so it’s clear that conversation might involve the exchange of values. But if one is not being paid for what one contributes to the conversation, in what sense could it be considered a trade? Because the conversation is voluntary, we know that each person chose to engage in it. Unless they did so for self-sacrificial reasons, or under coercion (which isn’t the way conversations normally work), then both people are getting value, each by his own judgment. The same pattern applies to personal relationships, even romantic love, which Rand insisted was very much a trade. Since we have discussed the value of visibility, we can get a better grasp of what that trade consists in: one gains self-affirmation, among other values, and provides the same in return.

Elements of the Trader Principle

The trader principle is an orientation toward others, a manner of approaching the social world and the values it has to offer. To understand why this principle is in our self-interest, we need to consider separately the distinct elements that go into it. Some of its elements are positive: it is the ethic of a rational producer, a person of independence and integrity, someone who practices the virtues we have discussed, for the reasons we have discussed. But it also has negative elements, ways of interacting that it rejects. It is these excluded forms of interaction to which we now turn our attention.

Living by the trader principle means that one should not give people what they do not deserve. That is, it rejects giving value without getting something of equal or greater value in return. One should not give alms merely because someone needs it, if there is no value for oneself to gain thereby —though, as we will see when we discuss benevolence, there are often genuine values one can get from generosity. One should not give approval where it is not merited, or sanction the undeserving. One should not engage in friendship out of pity,

but out of admiration. Thus one element of the trader principle is the *rejection of self-sacrifice*.

To be a trader means that one does not attempt to live by alms either, or attempt to gain values without giving value in return. One should not expect material benefits for nothing, rather one should earn one's living and buy, sell and trade for what one needs. One should neither expect one's faults to be excused without reason, nor expect to be loved without cause. This element of the trader principle is *existential independence*.

The principles of non-self-sacrifice and independence together ensure that one's interactions with others are to *mutual benefit*. There is a second aspect to trade reflected in its definition, namely that trade is a species of *voluntary interaction*. The trader principle means, then, that one should never seek to gain values by interfering with the ability of others to choose their actions. The only means we have of fundamentally hindering the free choice of others is the use or the threat to use physical force. Eschewing force also means that one should not attempt to win values by fraud, which uses force implicitly. This element of the trader principle is *non-coercion*.

To understand the logical basis of the trader principle, we need to understand the basis of each of these elements in our needs as human beings. We will take each one of them in turn:

Non-Self-Sacrifice

The element of non-self-sacrifice is simplest of the three to demonstrate, but that does not make it less important. Indeed, we have noted that one should relate the importance of a principle to one's own particular context. Self-sacrifice is a familiar ideal, known today in such phrases as John F. Kennedy's "ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." Upholding one's own long-term interests as against the claims of others is a crucial moral and psychological task.

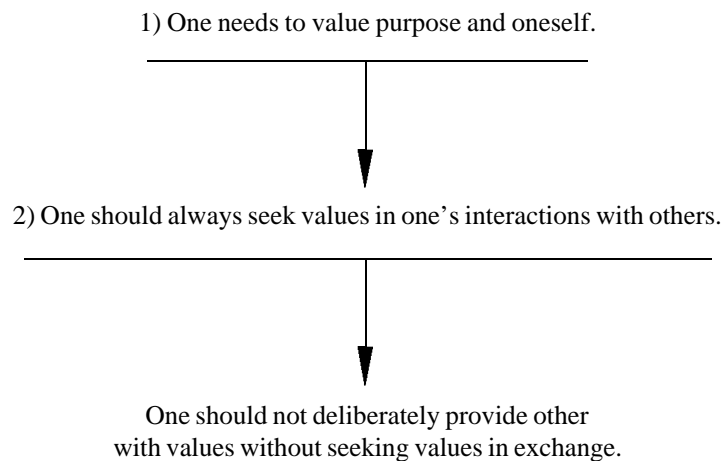
The rejection of self-sacrifice follows directly from our need for the cardinal values of purpose and self: to esteem purpose is to have a commitment to seeking values, to using one's time *for* something. To value oneself is to require that one's purposes ultimately benefit oneself. To sacrifice one's values is to use one's time for no benefit to oneself. It is to give something for nothing. Diagram 6.4 takes us through this argument.:

Premise 1 states that **one needs to value purpose and oneself**. We established these two cardinal values in diagram 4.1. Valuing purpose means ensuring that one acts purposefully; valuing oneself means acting for and for one's own benefit. In general, this means that whatever one is doing should be of value to oneself. Since one's interaction with other people is simply an instance of this broader commitment to values, we can directly infer from premise

1 that **one should always seek values in one's interactions with others**. This intermediate conclusion is **Premise 2**.

Diagram 6.4: Non-Self-Sacrifice

Inductive evidence: No new inductive premises



Many traditional ethics divide man's actions between those that serve needs, and those that provide luxuries. In this view, one's life has requirements for material values such as food, without which it cannot continue. But after one has seen to requirements of this sort, everything else is "gravy." One can spend one's luxury time on the pursuit of personal pleasure, or in serving others. But we do not have "luxury" time in this sense. Furthermore, the traditional view exalts service to others as a higher calling than self-interest. As we observed in Chapter 4, this doctrine is inimical to the pursuit of happiness and the recognition that one's own life is one's ultimate value.

Ayn Rand often pointed out that life is a full-time job. As we noted in diagram 3.2, human needs are open-ended. There always is more that one could do to enrich one's own ability to live and to pursue one's happiness. One always has purposes that one could further with a little more time, effort, or resources. To the extent that one evades one's needs, one is undermining one's own life,

purposes and happiness.

Action against one's purposes is *arbitrary*, i.e., action for no benefit, action that is for nothing of personal import. In epistemology, an arbitrary claim is one without any evidence behind it, such as "there are green men in the Andromeda Galaxy." It is a conclusion without a reason. As we saw when we discussed the cardinal value of purpose in Chapter 4, an arbitrary action is one without any value behind it. It is an action inconsistent with one's objective hierarchy of values. Because life is a full-time job, arbitrary action is anti-life. At the same time, action directed at anti-life goals is arbitrary. In other words, people can *choose* goals that are arbitrary. No one can deny that a suicide bomber is purposeful, for example; but he does not aim at a value in objective terms. A suicide bomber is a particularly drastic example of explicit self-sacrifice. But one's life is at stake in any case of arbitrary action, albeit in a less totalistic manner.

Of course, one might say that a person who tries to work against his purposes takes defeating himself as *one of* his purposes. This is what ascetics practicing self-abnegation, such as Zen Buddhist monks or Christian penitents, try to do systematically.²³ But in fact one *cannot* do so systematically: As we noted in Chapter 2, any putative ultimate end other than life—such as service to God or Society—embroils one in contradictions of one sort or another. The best that ascetics can manage is to inure themselves psychologically to material and spiritual deprivation, in part through a hope, often self-deceptive, of enjoying a future benefit, either in this world or in a supernatural realm hereafter.²⁴

Logically, premise 2 leads directly to our conclusion. To see this, let's convert premise 2 into its logical obverse (the principle that expresses the meaning of premise 2 in negative terms): one should never *not* seek values in one's interactions with others. From this, we can infer the **conclusion** of our argument: **one should not deliberately provide others with values without seeking values in exchange.** The conclusion is simply a new expression of the obverse of 2, with a restriction to the area of deliberate action, which is, of course, the only action that we can bring under moral control.

To understand how to apply this principle, we should first distinguish between two cases of deliberately providing values to others. One can provide values to others at an expense to oneself: this is self-sacrifice. But one can also knowingly provide others with value in the course of pursuing one's own values, at no net expense to oneself. This is what happens for instance when one plants a lovely garden, and the neighbors get to "free ride" on the aesthetic pleasure the garden provides. In economics, a "free-rider" is someone who is able to enjoy a good without paying for it. But that means that someone else is paying; at least someone else is doing the producing.

The principle of non-sacrifice does not apply to cases of what economists call "non-rival" goods, if one derives full benefit from the provision of

that good. Non-rival goods are values another person can enjoy without detracting from one's own enjoyment. For example, the fact that the neighbors admire one's garden, does not make it any less beautiful in one's own eyes. It would be a sacrifice to make one's garden beautiful for the ultimate benefit of the neighbors, but it is not a sacrifice to make a beautiful garden for one's own benefit that the neighbors happen to enjoy.

Notice that the principle of non-self-sacrifice does not mean that one should never assist others. As we will see later in this chapter, benevolent concern for others, including generosity, is an important means of achieving one's values in society. But benevolent concern is an expression of one's own interests and purposes; it is an investment in others, not a sacrifice. Neither does the rejection of self-sacrifice imply that one should not act for the benefit of others. Rather, it excludes acting for another's sake if that comes at the price of one's own ultimate well-being.

Is the rejection of self-sacrifice therefore vacuous? It is not, indeed it is one of the most important principles of Objectivism. Without a proper recognition of the dangers of self-sacrifice, it is easy to slide into seeing the value-directed principles of ethics as acontextual duties, and thereby distort an ethic aimed at supporting one's life to one that undermines it.

For example, we have seen that acting justly is a matter of treating other people in such a way as to encourage sources of value and discourage threats. It is not a blanket duty to encourage sources of value at the price of self-sacrifice, however: as a teleological ethic, Objectivism considers something to be a "source of value" only if, in context, it is a *net* source of value. For instance, a coconut tree is a source of nutrition, but since growing one in northern latitudes requires a greater expenditure of nutrients than the tree can provide, it is not, in the context of the life of a Poughkeepsie resident, the positive net source of value that it would be to the resident of a tropical island. Similarly, the better educated a child is, the greater a source of value he will tend to be, primarily for himself, but secondarily for others. This does not mean that financing the education of *every* child on earth is a net source of values to the rest of us: education is expensive, after all, and the values one can expect to gain from a person unconnected with oneself are usually rather small.

There is such a danger of setting one's own needs aside because, in the culture at large, self-sacrifice is elevated both rhetorically and often in practice to the status of a moral ideal. *Altruism*—which holds that one should act primarily out of concern for the welfare of others—is the ethical doctrine derived from that ideal.²⁵ Altruism is the source of the view that once one has seen to one's needs, one should go on to work for the benefit of others.

Altruism is an arbitrary ethical doctrine, one divorced from our needs. Because one's needs are in fact open ended, altruism cannot find a true dividing line between "needs" and "luxuries." In practice, this has meant that the level of

self-sacrifice advocated by altruists has varied with cultural trends: it is considered appropriate in America today, for instance, for a Christian to spend enough money on dinner for his cat or dog to feed a family of four in an impoverished country. Such relativism is inevitable: at any level of sacrifice on the part of the Christian, there would always remain the endless needs of countless others, clamoring for his attention, just as his own needs would go neglected.²⁶

Because no true division between needs and luxuries exists, any division between the legitimate needs of the altruist and his duties to others is necessarily a convention due mainly to the altruist's cultural and economic context. At any level of sacrifice, except self-immolation, there is always more one could sacrifice, while at the same time there are always genuine needs one is neglecting. Because of this, preachers of self-sacrifice have needed to idealize complete self-immolation in the service of others. If one thought a small sacrifice of one's life and purposes to others to be "noble," then one would naturally be drawn to idolize large sacrifices as well.

But in fact, the opposite is true: the complete *rejection* of self-sacrifice is the noblest commitment a person can make in this regard. This is especially true when we see self-sacrifice as a character trait. Rejecting self-sacrifice means rejecting the habit of putting others first and one's own priorities second—a dangerous habit that can cause one to fail to approach life's challenges imaginatively.²⁷ By practicing non-self-sacrifice, one incorporates into one's sub-conscious a perspective on one's purposes that is vital to pride: the sense of being both agent *and* beneficiary of all one's actions. This is the perspective of a person who knows profoundly both who is in charge of his life, and who he is living for, and who, being that person, is engaged in making the most his every minute.

Existential Independence

Ayn Rand held that not only should one never sacrifice oneself to others in the normal context of life, but also that one should never sacrifice others to oneself. One can sacrifice others by using force against them. This is coercion, which we will discuss shortly. More generally, we can sacrifice others to our needs by accepting value from them without offering value in return. This is existential dependence.

At the beginning of this chapter, we described the virtue of *independence* as *the commitment to acting on the basis of one's own grasp of reality and choice of goals, and relying on one's own effort to achieve them*. In diagram 6.1, we proceeded to analyze the cognitive aspect of independence, autonomy, which pertains to acting on the basis of one's independent judgment. Now we turn to the second aspect of independence, which pertains to relying on one's own efforts by never seeking the unearned from others.

In diagram 5.7 we discussed the virtue *productiveness* as a broad *commitment to taking responsibility for achieving one's values*. In effect, existential independence represents an extension of this principle into the social realm. Just as cognitive independence is a commitment to acting one's *own* reason, so *existential independence is a commitment to one's achieving values by one's own efforts*.

Why do we need a separate argument for existential independence? Could we not simply deduce it from the virtue of productiveness, as we inferred the rejection of self-sacrifice from the cardinal values of purpose and self? We could not. In the first place, in establishing our need for productive work in diagram 5.5, we left one premise (premise 5) incompletely validated. One aspect of that premise concerned the practicability of dependence as a mode of obtaining values.

But what about diagram 5.7? It has no such weak premise. However, the argument in diagram 5.7 does not fully establish what "taking responsibility" for one's values consists in. Without further evidence, that argument means that one should find practical means to one's values. If dependence is an effective means to values, perhaps one should take responsibility by finding bountiful sources of indiscriminate charity. In diagram 6.5 we analyze the social context that diagrams 5.5 and 5.7 ignored and thereby address the question of whether existential dependence is practical.

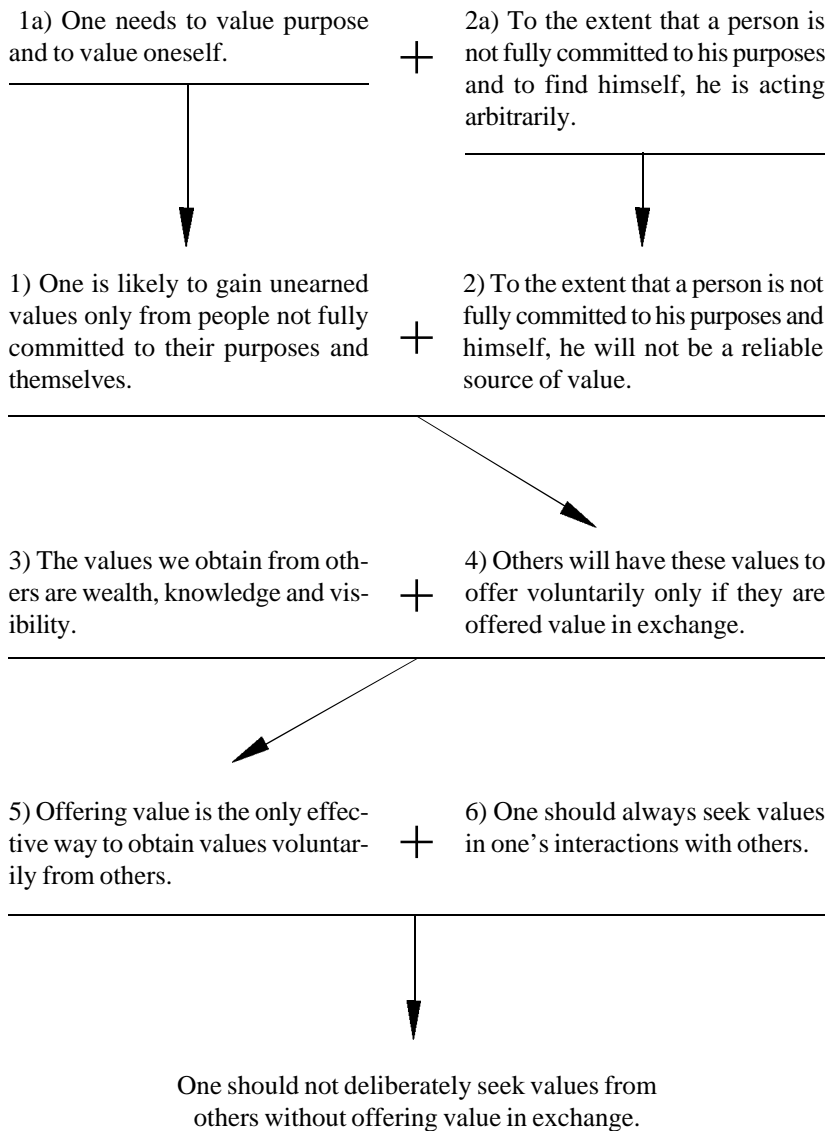
We observed in Chapter 3 that production was the overwhelmingly dominant and therefore characteristic mode of human survival. Yet, as we saw in our discussion of diagram 5.5, this is true of humanity as an aggregate in a much more straightforward way than it can be true of an individual. On average, humanity must produce because there simply are not enough free material values, such as berries on the vine, to support any kind of civilization. In any case, modern civilization—with all its benefits to individual well-being—is so completely dependent on produced goods that it could not exist without industrial mass production.

But if we approach the issue of existential dependence from the perspective of the particular individual, we cannot ignore the possibility that one might be able to "free ride," as it were, on the productive activities of society at large. If everyone else is producing, there seems to be room for a particular individual to manage without doing so. Indeed, we all know of empirical evidence that points in that direction. People live on inherited wealth, after all, and there are people who get by, after a fashion on government handouts. None of these behaviors would be possible to a Robinson Crusoe: it is easy to argue for production as a mode of life if no other people are producing values. But a situation like Crusoe's is very rare; in real life mooching off the producers seems to be a possible alternative mode of life.

So why not be dependent on others if one can get away it? Isn't it an

Diagram 6.5: Existential Independence

Inductive Evidence: 2a) introspection, psychology, ethics
3) Social sciences, psychology, ethics



easy life if one can swing being dependent on others? This is the challenge that the argument for existential independence must answer.

The conclusion of diagram 6.5 casts the principle of existential independence as a negative element of the trader principle: *one should not deliberately seek values from others without offering value in exchange*. This is possible because, as with autonomy, what existential independence adds to our ethical knowledge is essentially a negative principle: a commitment to rely on one's own efforts *as against* those of other people. Thus the conclusion that we seek to establish in diagram 6.5 and the existential component of the virtue of independence are logically equivalent in our context.

We begin diagram 6.5 with the cardinal values of purpose and self. This is **Premise 1a: one needs to value purpose and to value oneself**. Our need for these cardinal values has the direct implication that we discussed in Diagram 6.4: every time one offers something for nothing, with no personal gain in view, one undermines one's own life and values. **Premise 1** expresses this implication as follows: **one is likely to gain unearned values only from people who are not fully committed to their purposes and themselves**. Except in the case of non-rival goods like the beautiful garden we discussed earlier, the only way to get unearned values is if the provider acts against his objective hierarchy of values, by sacrificing himself.

Premise 2a takes up a related point: **To the extent that a person is not fully committed to his purposes and to himself, he is acting arbitrarily**. As we noted in Chapter 4 one's hierarchy of purposes should relate one's actions to oneself as their proper beneficiary. Any time one acts against one's purposes and oneself, in that instance one is acting for no moral reason: arbitrarily. Instead, one is acting in an incoherent, self-destructive, psychologically damaging manner, without reference to one's deepest values. Those are the practical effects of acting arbitrarily.²⁸

The inference we wish to draw from premise 2a is **Premise 2: To the extent that a person is not fully committed to his purposes and himself, he will not be a reliable source of value**. A person who acts for arbitrary purposes severs the link between the psychological experience of benefit and the use of reason to create or obtain values. In the first place, someone providing a value for no benefit to himself has no real reason to act for the sake of *this* person rather than *that* one. This alone raises a doubt as to how one could count on the reliable provision of values from such a source.

More fundamentally, we should ask ourselves what unearned values we would hope to gain from others, and see how one might come to gain them. In Chapter 4, we noted that there are three types of social values: economic exchange, communication, and visibility. **Premise 3** reminds us of this conclusion in more concrete terms: **the values we obtain from others are wealth, knowledge, and visibility**. This is not necessarily an exhaustive list of social

values, but it characterizes the gamut of particular values we seek from others, from money and property to friendship and love. Let's take each the "big three" values in turn:

- *Wealth* must be produced, for all the reasons we surveyed in Chapter 3, and employing all the rational virtues we have analyzed so far. It is productive work that has increased the stock of wealth in society, and as we noted in diagram 5.5, it is by the productive application of reason that people maintain a stock of wealth over time. Aside from producers, the only other significant sources of unearned wealth would be those who take wealth from producers, by coercion or by hitting the jackpot as a dependent.
- *Knowledge*, as we observed in Chapter 1, is created by an objective process of reason. It can be communicated in courses and books, but as we noted in diagram 6.1, one cannot simply inherit knowledge from others; one only has knowledge when one has an independent grasp of the truth of one's conclusions. To the extent that others are able to provide us with knowledge that they justifiably regard as true, they have validated their conclusions by their own effort.
- *Visibility*: as we noted in discussing diagram 4.5, one gains visibility from another person's response to one's personality and character. But only a person who himself possesses certain character traits can be the source of a reliable and intimate response. A person must be honest, to respond to one's real self, and to do so credibly. He must be sensitive, to respond to traits that aren't evident on the surface. And he must take the time and effort to get to know one: he is unlikely to do so if he doesn't expect to benefit.

Who would be able and willing to provide these values for nothing? Integrating our study of human nature and rational living from Chapters 3, 4, and 5, we can see that those who produce *wealth* are likely to be self-interested. They are likely to engage in moral judgment of anyone who asks them for assistance, and they tend to ask "What's in it for me?" Someone who gains wealth by taking, on the other hand—either by dependence or coercion—approaches other people with an eye to what he can extract from them. It is not accidental that bums and thieves are not regarded in the popular culture as generous people. Their manner of dealing with others shapes their characters against generosity.²⁹ Thus, only producers are likely to be *able* to provide wealth, but their characters are likely to rebel *against* providing a living to those who won't earn it.

What about *knowledge*? To the extent that one tries to gain knowledge without exerting effort of one's own to validate it, we have seen in diagram 6.1 that what one will get instead is a body of opinions that are only valid to the—unknown—extent that others reached them by objective means. But to the extent that one counts on others to provide knowledge at no benefit to themselves, one has no reason to expect them to engage in the effort to validate to the opin-

ions they offer.³⁰

In the case of *visibility*, we find that we can only get it from people who have developed an honest, value-directed, rational character. But once again, people of this character are unlikely to engage in self-sacrifice, especially in the most intimate values they pursue. As Ayn Rand observed, “a selfless’ or a ‘disinterested’ love is a contradiction in terms: it means that one is indifferent to that which one values.”³¹

So, we can infer from premises 1 and 2 that **others will have these values to offer only if they are offered value in exchange**. This is **Premise 4**. One must offer values to others if one expects them to offer values in response, because only rational, self-interested people are likely to be able to offer values, and because self-sacrifice is incompatible with their values and character.

As we saw in discussing diagram 6.1 (autonomy), there is one sense in which we are all extremely “dependent” on others. This is our mutual interdependence through the marketplace and the division of labor to provide particular goods we need. To enhance our efficiency, we specialize in certain areas of knowledge or lines of work. This means we rely on others to provide the values that we don’t produce ourselves. We rely on anonymous farmers and grocers to provide our food. We rely on anonymous engineers, industrialists and factory workers build our refrigerators, stoves, cars, heaters, and so on. We even rely on some writers of philosophy books to offer us profound wisdom in convenient form.

This interdependence is not the moocher’s dependence on the sacrifices of others, but rather a process of self-interested *trade* to mutual benefit. It is the interdependence of the grocery store, not the dependence of the soup kitchen. We can count on others to provide values in trade, because doing so is consistent with their own needs and character. We can count on the fact that if we offer someone more value than he can produce on his own, then he will gladly engage in trade with us. By providing for the needs of others by our own production, we give them reason to provide for our needs in return.

By contrast, anyone who would sufficiently embrace arbitrary values to be *willing* to provide one with a significant amount of value, and not just a quarter in a tin cup, must evade his own needs and goals to such an extent that he would be unlikely to be *able* to produce wealth or achieve spiritual values. We will not gain wealth by mooching from people who have no wealth themselves, and we are very unlikely to find a profligate heir or aged millionaire ready to hand over big money for nothing. Similarly, we cannot gain knowledge from the ignorant, or satisfactory personal relationships from people who care little for honesty and pride.

So we can conclude from Premises 3 and 4 that **offering value is the only effective way to obtain values voluntarily from others**. This is **Premise 5**. (Notice that premise 5 only refers to the values we can obtain from others

voluntarily. We will take up the possibility of obtaining values *involuntarily* in the next section, when we turn to coercion.)

Premise 6 reminds us that **one should always seek values in one's interactions with others**. Given this, and the intermediate conclusion stated in Premise 5, we have the following **conclusion** to our argument **one should not deliberately seek values from others without offering value in exchange**. This element of living by trade is existential independence. It means that being responsible in social context implies a commitment to achieving one's values by one's *own* efforts.

Of course, our argument for existential independence does not deny that one can occasionally gain something from the generosity of strangers. Panhandlers do find money in their cups now and then, and the odd worthless heir does inherit a fortune. Some hospitals do perform emergency surgery on those who cannot pay for it. The point is that one cannot expect to gain enough that way to support one's life. One can't pay the rent panhandling. One can't count on receiving a big inheritance, and free emergency surgery will not cover one's long-term health-care needs.

Because dependence is at most an unreliable and limited source of values, one gains from excluding mooching habits from one's character. To the extent that one spends one's time looking to others rather than to oneself as the agent responsible for seeing to one's needs, one cultivates a trait in oneself that undermines one's effectiveness in the vast majority of situations. A principled, independent person is more likely to *merit* the generosity of strangers in emergencies when he would need it, and in the normal course of life his commitments to productiveness and to dealing with others by trade will tend to secure him far more values than he could ever hope to gain by sponging.

The most pervasive form of dependency today is dependence on mandated government entitlements. Although it is no road to wealth, government health and welfare benefits in most industrialized countries make it possible for most anyone to enjoy a modest financial income, with subsidies for food, rent and health care often thrown in, for extended periods of time.

Relying on handouts even so well-funded as these is not recommended on its face. As numerous studies have shown, the habits of welfare-dependence make it difficult for one to succeed in the marketplace, while the limited benefits mire one in poverty.³² To that extent, dependence on welfare is an example of the dangers of developing a character oriented away from production and trade. In this it is much like any other form of dependence.

But as sources of material values, government-sponsored entitlements are peculiarly indiscriminating and abundant. Governments are able to do this because their wealth is not obtained voluntarily from society, but extracted by means of force. We will discuss the nature of government in Chapter 7. Now, we turn to its basis in coercion.

Non-Coercion

The third negative element of the trader principle is the commitment not to seek values by initiating physical force against others. It means abjuring the methods and life of a predator. But why should one do so? If one could take what one needed, or force others to provide for one, why shouldn't one? Coercion, after all, is not a passive dependence on others, and it does not require one to sacrifice oneself in any obvious manner. If coercion is a practical means of gaining values, perhaps one should strive, like Julius Caesar, to proudly, energetically, and responsibly seek success as a conqueror, slave owner, and dictator. In diagram 6.6 we will see that coercion does involve the sacrifice of one's self-interest, and that as a character trait it is not a practical means of seeking values in society.

One might suggest arguing against coercion on the grounds that it violates rights. A similar tack might be to say that non-coercion is a kind of ethical "axiom."³³ But both of these invert the order of ethical argument. We cannot prove non-coercion with principles, such as rights, that require the principle of non-coercion for their own validation. And we cannot call a principle an "axiom" if it is not truly self-evident. Non-coercion is far from self-evident. Rather, it depends on a long and complex chain of reasoning. Perhaps it *seems* self-evident because dealing with others without coercion is such a habitual practice in modern life that its fruits seem to stand right before our eyes. But then crime and governmental coercion are also commonplace.

Like dependence, coercion involves skills that are at odds with the skills a producer and trader requires. Being a successful thief, for instance, requires skill in identifying possessions of others that are vulnerable, in deception to hide one's crimes, and in applying intimidation and violence to others to ensure their cooperation. One might conduct a similar sort of analysis for other "careers" based on coercion: the leader of gang, for instance, needs less skill in stealth than does a thief, but more skill in intimidation, deception and violence). As we noted in discussing existential independence, one's character is formed by one's pattern of behavior. So people who acquire a set of skills like these will find it difficult to behave otherwise. The businessman who tries to be a thief lacks these skills, and is likely to be clumsy and get caught. The thief who tries to be a businessman is likely to produce a poor, expensive product, and lose money. There is a reason why Mafia Dons stick to enterprises like garbage collection and construction where intimidation and political pull can count for more, in some cities, than productive efficiency.

So one's choice in life is not to be both a good producer and a good predator, as occasion permits. Rather, one must choose one or the other as a mode of life, and develop the character required to do well at it. As a practical matter, one should only choose a mode of life that is likely to prove a reliable

source of values.

Where most thinkers have approached coercion in either terms of moral injunctions or narrowly pragmatic assessments the chances of arrest or retaliation, Ayn Rand offered an argument that unites the moral with the practical by showing that force is fundamentally opposed to reason. She expressed her view with aphoristic directness: “To deal with men by force is as impractical as to deal with nature by persuasion.”

Diagram 6.6: Non-Coercion

Inductive evidence 2) Introspection, psychology, law

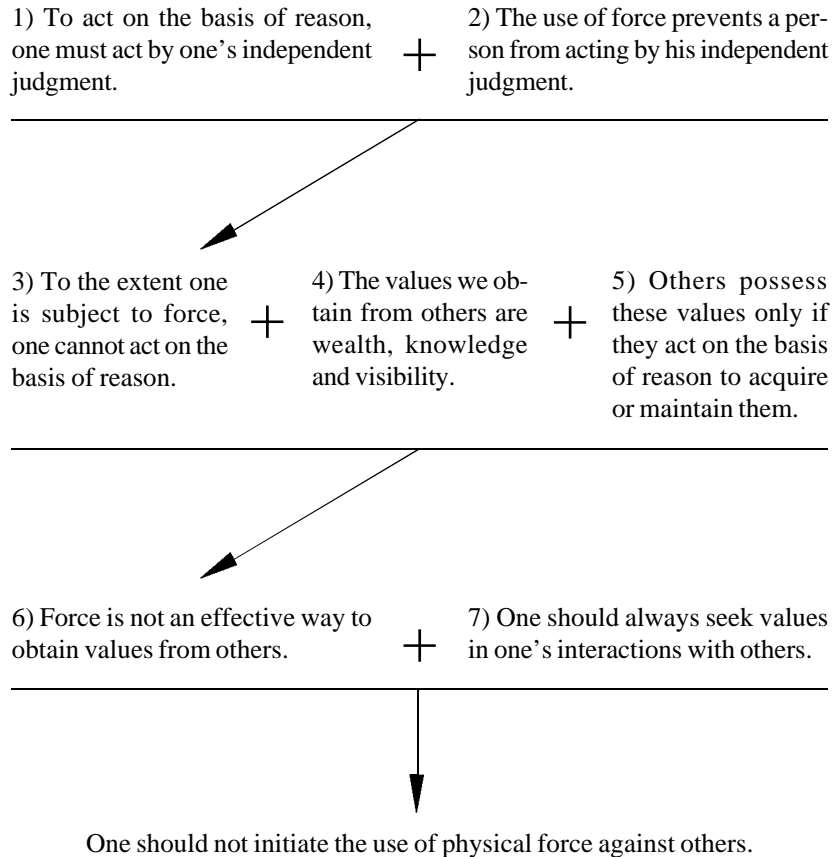


Diagram 6.6 presents the Objectivist argument that “crime does not pay,” because it is opposed to our need to live by reason. To contrast force and rationality, we begin with the basic nature of reason. **Premise 1** reminds us that **to act on the basis of reason, one must act by one’s independent judgment.** This derives from the facts of reason we considered in discussing diagram 6.1. Reason is a faculty of the individual mind, and ultimately, all one’s reliable knowledge must be arrived at or confirmed by one’s own process of reasoning.

Premise 2 expresses the key fact about coercion: **the use of force prevents a person from acting by his independent judgment.** To use force on someone is to physically injure or kill him, against his will, or to take without his permission the fruits of his labor. One uses physical force, in all these cases, to counter the will of its victim and thereby impose an injury or to take a value. In every case that one imposes one’s actions on the person or products of another, one is preventing him from acting on his own judgment.³⁴ If one uses force to threaten him, one is creating an artificial contradiction between his life and his values, which makes it impossible to him to act as he would like. If one imprisons someone, then one is restricting the physical realm of his actions. If one takes a person’s products, then one is preventing him from acting for his purposes, since his products are his purposes only to the extent that he can use them as he deems fit.

For all the foregoing reasons, we can see that Premises 1 and 2 lead us to the following intermediate conclusion(**Premise 3**): **to the extent one is subject to force, one cannot act on the basis of reason.**

Some readers may wonder why premise 3 is not the conclusion of the diagram. Since we have shown that one needs reason as a cardinal value (diagram 4.1), have we not now shown that force is inimical to our basic values? Isn’t it a matter of justice to recognize the wrongness of using force?

Certainly, premise 3 establishes that one needs freedom from force, other things equal. What it does *not* establish is that one should not use force *against others*. Attila the Hun could have agreed with premise 3: for his own part, he no doubt preferred not to be interfered with. No one wants to be a slave, after all. But Attila would have argued that one should still use force against others, to conquer and dominate for one’s own part as best one can.

Nor can we deduce a universal prohibition on force from premise 3 and our commitment to justice. Fundamentally, justice is not a commitment to treat all people equally, but is a policy of evaluating the potential of others to offer values or threaten us. If force were an effective means of obtaining substantial values from others, then justice would consist in evaluating the potential of others to be exploited by coercion! So we still have to show what it is about the role of reason in human life that makes the use of force an ineffective means of obtaining values.

What values would we hope to obtain? **Premise 4** reminds us that **the**

values we obtain from others are wealth, knowledge and visibility (This was premise 3 of diagram 5.5). **Premise 5** reminds us that **others possess these values only if they act on the basis of reason to acquire or maintain them.** As we noted in discussing existential independence, these values are all created by production or by the rational, independent cultivation of personal traits, and even inherited wealth is only possessed for any length of time by those who apply reason to maintain it. These values do not appear in nature, and they cannot be produced in any quantity by the sort of animal labor a slave can be induced to provide.

Can one gain spiritual or social values by force? Some might think that the ability to bully others is a source of confidence in one's efficacy; but psychological studies do not tend to find that forcing others to do one's will is a sign of genuine self-confidence: a person of confidence feels comfortable standing on his own two feet and letting others go their own way.³⁵ Similarly, though one might attempt to view rape as a quest for egoistic values, it is by now a commonplace in psychology to note that rapists receive little in the way of the values of visibility, pleasure, and intimacy that romantic sexual interaction provides. As for gaining knowledge by force, of course one can frighten a person into revealing a fact he knows, and one can steal a book, but one cannot force a man to think, especially about a question the answer to which one does not know.³⁶

What about theft? Couldn't one big, successful heist set one up for life, at least in material terms? The unlikeliness of this as a mode of seeking a living is demonstrated by the relative paucity of successful exemplars of it. This paucity is inductive evidence for premise 5. The reason that theft is rarely successful over the long term is that any instance of crime necessitates a lifetime of deception, and thus a life of crime necessitates a life consisting of deception. As we observed when we discussed the virtue of honesty, it is very hard to sustain complex deceptions for any extended period of time, and doing so comes at the price of placing the maintenance of the deception over one's own perception of reality and pursuit of values. Furthermore, a life of theft requires that one move outside the law, which exposes one to the harsh attentions of fellow criminals. Finally, it gives many people reason to use force against one in self-defense. For all these reasons, even if one were to come across an apparently perfect opportunity for theft, one would do well to recall that appearances can be deceiving. More generally, in light of these points it is hard to see theft as a successful mode of life.

There is a form of theft that has proven relatively reliable: this is the theft practiced by the government official or aristocrat. Because a government exercises final authority on the use of force within its territory, a feudal lord, tax-farmer, elected official, or modern dictator can employ force to seize wealth (and sexual attentions in some cases) with greater impunity than any common

thief or mugger enjoys. And because government does serve an important role in society, a role we will discuss further in Chapter 7, the officer of government can assume a guise of moral propriety.

The context of discussion in this chapter is the life of the individual in society. To a certain extent, the very idea of succeeding in life as a dictator or aristocrat depends on a wider context: the structure of society. The individual has little control in immediate terms over his social structure: for instance, it would be foolish to seek to become an aristocratic ruler in modern America. One cannot hope to be an aristocratic or dictatorial ruler without endorsing aristocracy and dictatorship, as against a free society. Yet why would one trade the fruits of the industrial revolution for the mass poverty and short, dangerous life that came before it. We now have ample evidence that even an aristocrat of the previous age was less able to live a long, happy, enriched life than the average talented person today. And were such a system to exist, it is highly unlikely one would have any chance of doing so well as an aristocrat.

In the modern context, dictatorships show a similar sort of pattern. Their economic failings are well known, but consider the life of the leader: Even a relatively long-lived dictator such as a Stalin lived a life of distrust, paranoia, threats, and insecurity. And for every Stalin or Mao who survives over the long term, there are many more Trotskys who do not. There is nothing, then, to recommend the quest for brute power as a mode of life.

As for the role of government officials in a mixed economy, we will have to consider the mixed economy more generally. This is a subject we will address in more detail in Chapter 7. In principle, it can be perfectly proper to work for the government as one would for any organization, since government does have a legitimate function. There remains the question of whether the government should have discretion over its use of force. This is a topic we treat in Chapter 7, where we consider the proper form that government should take.

Returning to the diagram, we can see that Premises 3, 4 and 5 give us the following intermediate conclusion: **force is not an effective way to obtain values from others.** This is **Premise 6**, and it completes the basis for our opposition to the initiation of the use of force against others.

Premise 7 reminds us that **one should always seek values in one's interactions with others.** In other words, it wouldn't be rational to use force against others without regard for its usefulness as a source of value. One should deal with others by principles that identify effective means to values.

Together, Premises 6 and 7 give us our **conclusion: one should not seek values from others by initiating force against them.** This is the element of non-coercion.

Note that although one should not employ force as a means of gaining values, it nevertheless is a valid means of preserving values in cases where others use force. Abjuring aggressive coercion does not mean that one should

not practice self-defense if one is attacked. This is why the principle of non-coercion concerns the initiation of force, not its use in general. When others initiate force against one, then one's use of force in response, if it is proportionate, is a matter of the defense of one's values, not an attempt to obtain values.

Like any principle, the non-coercion principle is contextual. Objectivism does not deny that if one's life depends on using force, as it does in a combat zone, one should certainly endeavor to use force. It is even true that there have been situations that have arisen where individuals have found themselves at each other's throats, as in some lifeboat situations. If one found oneself in such a situation, one should act accordingly. But such situations are rare; as we noted in chapter 2, even people trapped in a lifeboat are more likely to gain from cooperating than from cannibalism. One has the most to gain from forming one's character in a manner suited to the normal course of life, even if this means that in certain genuinely possible—but extremely rare—situations, one's character may not be the best suited to gaining values.³⁷ The character of a person who succeeds in society is not that of one who indulges a tendency to use force to gain values, but rather is that of one who seeks values through voluntary exchange and rational persuasion.

The Trader Principle

We have now established the three negative elements of the trader principle: non-self-sacrifice, existential independence, and non-coercion. As we have seen each of these trace back to the cardinal values, although by somewhat different routes, and each integrates means of pursuing our cardinal values in the context of society. Together with the positive virtues we have considered in this and the previous chapter, they imply that trade is the only method of interaction consistent with human nature and values. Diagram 6.7 shows how the three elements fit together:

Premise 1 summarizes the conclusion of diagram 6.6, non-coercion: **one should not seek values from others by initiating force against them.**

Premise 2 unites the conclusions of diagram 6.5, existential independence, and diagram 6.4, non-self-sacrifice: **One should seek values from others, and offer values to them, only in exchange for values.**

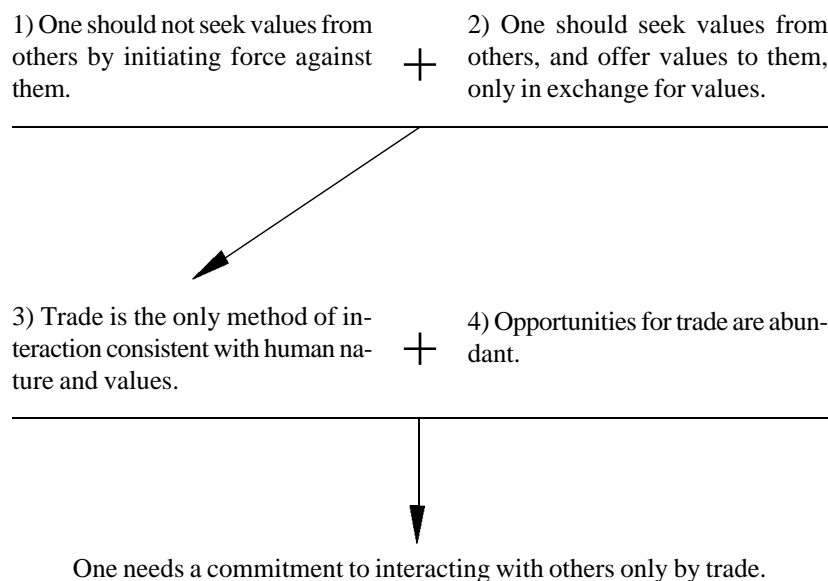
Recall the definition of trade: *Trade is voluntary interaction to mutual benefit.* Because trade is voluntary, it is inimical to the initiation of force. Premise 1 states that we need to reject the initiation of force; because trade is to mutual benefit, it does not tolerate the giving or receiving of sacrifices. Premise 2 states that we need to neither suffer nor demand sacrifices. This is why we can infer from premises 1 and 2 that **trade is the only method of interaction consistent with human nature and values (Premise 3).**

Premise 3 is not sufficient reason for us to embrace the trader principle

as our principle of ethics. For that conclusion, we require an additional premise, **Premise 4: opportunities for trade are abundant.** If premise 4 were not true, most of the discussion in this chapter would be moot. Trade would not be so important as to merit the central place in our social ethics. However, premise 4 is derived from the immense amount of inductive evidence of massive opportunities for trade that we get from personal experience, and from scholarship in fields such as history and economics. Indeed, it is far from accidental that opportunities for trade are abundant: as long as one values the goods that others can produce, and others likewise value the goods that one can produce, the principle of comparative advantage shows that we will always stand to benefit from trade. The very fact that we are all quite diverse in our abilities, tastes, habits, wealth, and so on, is the basis of our opportunities for trade. It is our differences that make some of us value one kind of work, or good, less than others value it, and because of that difference, we can trade what we value less for that which we value more.

Diagram 6.7: The Trader Principle

Inductive evidence: 4) personal experience, economics



Together, premises 3 and 4 allow us to **conclude that one should interact with others only through trade**. This is the trader principle, firmly established by a process of reasoning from our self-interest in living our lives.

We could also express this conclusion in another way, by saying that human interests are not in conflict. As our discussion of the practicality of living by trade has shown, life is not a “zero-sum game,” wherein we procure our survival at the price of another’s life. Trade is not a world of “dog-eat-dog,” — *that* is the code of the thief or dictator, the moocher or altruist, who consider one person’s sacrifice to be the basic means to another’s well-being. Trade is a policy of “live and let live,” where “live” is meant quite literally. Trade is the policy of a society of independent, flourishing producers. Fundamentally, it is our shared interest in a society that respects the principle of trade wherein the harmony of our interests lies.

This does not mean that people do not compete for jobs, for business, for a taxicab. It does not even imply that reasonable people may not have disagreements from time to time. But such conflicts are short-term, and local. We compete for jobs, but share our interest in leaving the employment decision up to the rational judgment of the employer. We may now and then have contract and property claim disputes, but recognize that our differences can be reasonably settled by an objective examination of the facts. That disputes can be objectively resolved is part of the basis for a rights-based legal system — a fact we will discuss in more detail in Chapter 7 when we turn to law and government. So despite local conflicts and competitions, our shared general interest in preserving the conditions and standards of trade persists.

In Ayn Rand’s non-fiction, the harmony of interests among people who live by reason is a common theme. Indeed, if one wanted to grab the attention of an audience, there is no better theme, for it summarizes the difference between the Objectivist view of man and society, and the traditional view. One might say: “Why is capitalism a moral system? How can selfishness be compatible with peace and justice? Because there are no conflicts of interest among rational men!”

The principle of the harmony of interests expresses in a single, abstract proposition, the essential facts of social life we have been discussing. Although these facts are pervasive and basic aspects of human nature, identifying them requires the analysis we have been conducting. Thus the principle of harmony of interests can only be established as a derivation from our conclusions about production, reason, integrity, independence, coercion, and trade. To show that our interests are in harmony, we must be able to show that the elements of the trader principle (premises 1 and 2 of diagram 6.7) are true. In fact, once we have established the trader principle, the principle of harmony of interests, while true and worthy, is logically redundant. This does not make it any less powerful for expressing in succinct terms the Objectivist reply to the “dog-

eat-dog” characterization of self-interest.

Benevolence

We have seen that the trader principle includes the negative elements of non-sacrifice, non-dependence, and non-coercion, and we have seen that in a positive sense it also means according justice to others. Justice is fundamentally a cognitive virtue of identification and evaluation. But to succeed in achieving one’s values by means of trade, one must also actively seek to create values and opportunities in one’s social interactions. This is the need that lies behind the virtue of benevolence. **Benevolence is a commitment to treating others as potential trading partners by recognizing their humanity and individuality and acting accordingly.** Its main elements are *civility*, *sensitivity*, and *generosity* towards others.³⁸

Why is benevolence not simply an aspect of justice? The difference between justice and benevolence is similar to the difference between rationality and productiveness: the former addresses one’s cognitive connection with the world, the latter addresses one’s existential connection with values.

Diagram 6.8: Benevolence

Inductive evidence: 2) & 3) Psychology, introspection, anthropology, history, economics.

1) One should interact with others only through trade.	+	2) To discover and exploit opportunities for trade, one must treat other people as potential trading partners.	+	3) One treats other people as potential trading partners by recognizing their humanity, and individuality.
--	---	--	---	--

↓

One needs a commitment to treating others as potential trading partners by recognizing their humanity and individuality and acting accordingly.

Benevolence is not simply a matter of how one should treat people of good moral character—if it were, then it would be little more than an extension of the principle of sanction. It is a basic approach to others in virtue of their humanity, one that is based on a universal, presumptive evaluation of others as worthy potential trading partners. Just as in law a person is presumed innocent until proven guilty, another person should be presumed to be of decent moral character in the absence of evidence to the contrary. After all, the average person one encounters is most likely, in view of all the considerations we have discussed, to be someone who creates value, is reasonable, and lives by trade. These are the most reliable means of living. The positive basic orientation toward others that benevolence represents, has its basis in this fact.

Diagram 6.8 lays out the argument for benevolence that derives from the trader principle:

Premise 1 reminds us of the conclusion of diagram 6.7: **one should interact with others only through trade.**

Premise 2 states a straightforward inductive claim based on the nature of trade: **to discover and exploit opportunities for trade, one must treat other people as potential trading partners.** Opportunities for trade are not self evident and they do not develop automatically once identified. Since other people are one's source of traded values, one cannot engage in trade without discovering the values they have to offer, and encouraging them to be providers of value.

As we have noted, this is not simply a matter of justice. There are principles of action that arise from the distinctive requirements of developing trading relationships with others. **Premise 3** is a broad inductive generalization that summarizes those requirements: **one treats other people as potential trading partners by recognizing their humanity, and individuality.**³⁹ This generalization is based on all the various ways people can pleasantly and/or profitably interact, and on the facts that we have considered in our preceding discussion of values and virtues. It is very abstract, so let's examine the facts that it integrates in more detail:

- *Humanity.* Recognizing the humanity of others means recognizing that they share the same kinds of basic needs and capacities that one possesses. These include: their capacity of volition, which means that they are fundamentally *independent*, self-directed beings; their need for visibility. Recognizing that they are as human as we includes recognizing the fundamental *harmony of interests* between them and us.

To discover and develop profitable relationships with others we must act in ways that demonstrate our recognition of these facts. We can recognize the harmony of our interests by making it evident by our generosity and open demeanor that we view interacting with them as an opportunity for both parties to gain. We can recognize their independence through practices of civility that “respect

their space” as the authors of their actions. We can grant even strangers a measure of visibility by responding to them with the particular attention that people deserve, as opposed to the inattention with which we treat inanimate and unconscious objects.

- *Individuality*: we can show that we recognize others as unique individuals through sensitivity to their particular characteristics, which include their personality, accomplishments, and context of knowledge. This means making the effort to communicate in terms of the other persons context, not one’s own. It means noting what is particular about each person, such as his name or distinctive achievements, and not treating him as a cog in the machine of business, or responding to him primarily as a stereotypical instance of a category such as his job, ethnicity, sex, etc.

Together, premises 1, 2 and 3 yield the **conclusion that one needs a commitment to treating others as potential trading partners, by recognizing their humanity and individuality, and acting accordingly.**

How is benevolence distinct from moral sanction? Both encourage others to be sources of value. Moral sanction appeals to others’ need for a sense of themselves as morally worthy, and it is basically reactive: it expresses one’s evaluation of their moral character, a judgment which would be premature in most cases in which one deals with others.

Compared with Justice, benevolence is a more pro-active policy of investing in others. It includes treating others by means of active practices of sensitivity, civility, and generosity. Each of these minor virtues helps us recognize both the humanity and the individuality of others. For example, generosity shows that one sees positive potential in the other person; most basically, that is a matter of his humanity. But generosity also is a means of connecting to others as individuals, as when we give someone a gift that recognizes something particular about him. These minor virtues of benevolence are also mutually supportive. For example, while giving a gift is a generous act—especially if one gives at a time when gifts are not expected—the most effective gifts derive from the giver’s sensitivity to the recipient’s taste and needs..

Benevolence also differs from justice in that it is a basic response to others that they deserve in virtue of their humanity. It is not based on a more detailed moral judgment; it is directed at their potential and not necessarily their character, of which one often knows little. Of course, as one comes to know a person well enough to assess his character, this presumption of positive potential is to a certain extent superseded by one’s informed evaluation. One might be generous to a promising stranger, for example, but not to a well-known moocher. One might be civil to an acquaintance out of general benevolence, whereas one is kind to one’s friend on the basis of his particular merits. In cases where one comes to know a person’s character, the practices of benevolence remain relevant as long as one knows that person to be essentially reasonable.

Appropriate tolerance towards people with whom one disagrees is an aspect of benevolence in this regard.⁴⁰

It is important to emphasize that benevolence is a virtue, and not an emotion. The conclusion of diagram 6.8 means that one should act toward others with good will (the etymological meaning of “benevolence”), not necessarily with good feelings. For instance, in the course of a sports match or other explicit competition, one’s immediate feelings—being focused on the concrete, competitive goals of the game—may include irritation toward the opposing team. It is natural in competition to respond to the other person as an opponent to be overcome, but of course a competitive opponent is not truly an enemy. Benevolence in this case consists in practicing the civilities of good sportsmanship, which demonstrate to one’s opponents that one recognizes that the conflict of the game is artificial and does not extend into broader realm of social life.

Benevolence is logically the last of the virtues, because it depends on the trader principle, and on conclusions from our discussions of other virtues. In one’s social interactions, true benevolence is an expression of one’s complete social ethic, and would be a different virtue without the others. Without justice, generosity becomes blind charity. Without independence, civility becomes currying favor. Without the principles of trade, sensitivity becomes the basis for manipulation and coercion. But although the justification of benevolence is logically derivative, it is still a vitally important virtue. One’s benevolence is one’s means of dealing with others on a daily basis: it colors all one’s social interactions. It is one’s primary virtue of seeking spiritual and social values from others, and a crucial means to the trade of material values as well.

In this chapter we have established the propriety of justice and the trader principle, as well as principles of independence and benevolence. Our benevolence is an expression of our respect for the harmony of interests that exists between ourselves and others, so long as others deal with us rationally and accord us the freedom to make the rational choices our lives and happiness require. A society characterized by such mutual respect might be termed a “benevolent” society; one that is auspicious to human life. The greatest threat to such a society is the widespread, unprincipled use of coercion, both by those who claim it furthers their self-interest, and by those who denounce self-interest as the root of all evil.

We now turn to the means of restraining that threat: the Objectivist theory of politics.

-
- 1 Rand, *The Fountainhead*, (*To say I love you quote: WHERE?)
 - 2 “Autonomy” is derived from the Greek for “self-rule” (*autonomos*). Since Objectivism regards thought as the seat of human volition, to control one’s actions in the most basic sense is to control one’s own thought.
 - 3 A “pundit” is, in Sanskrit, a learned man, especially a religious or moral instructor. A “guru” is a teacher.
 - 4 Johnson, Paul, *The History of Christianity* (*Where: who, when) 301
 - 5 Whether Aristotle actually held this view is in debate. Roderick Long argues for this interpretation in *Rationality, Theoretical and Practical: Aristotle versus Rand* (Poughkeepsie: Institute for Objectivist Studies, forthcoming). Contrary views include Gottlieb and Lenox (cite*).
 - 6 Quote from Aquinas? * “The appeal to authority is a fallacy, as Bonaventure said.”
 - 7 Free will does not, of course, imply that one can undo the effects of past human actions by any means other than those one would apply to a “metaphysical” fact. But it does mean that patterns of human behavior can be revised.
 - 8 Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* 1019
 - 9 Rand discusses this idea in contrast to the common-place understanding of envy, in “The Age of Envy” in *The New Left: the Anti-Industrial Revolution* 152.
 - 10 Rand, “How Does One Lead a Rational Life in an Irrational Society?” in *The Virtue of Selfishness* 71.
 - 11 The fallacy of failing to recognize the agent-relative character of goodness sometimes takes the form of the conversion of the phrase “X is good for Joe” to “It ought to be the case that Joe do/have X.” Thus the agent-relative nature of “the good for Joe” is improperly converted into the categorical “it ought to be the case that.”(*)
 - 12 In Statistics, to say something is “significantly correlated” with something else is to say that the two act together in a manner that is unlikely to be the result of random motion. In this usage, an effect may be “significant,” but not be large. Character significantly affects one’s ability to be a source of value in the broader, colloquial sense of the term. Its effect is not merely non-random, but also large.
 - 13 J.P. Morgan, who combined the ardent practice of self-interest and Capitalism, yet advocated Christian charity, is an instance of this. See e.g. Ron Chernow, *The Morgans* (Where: who, when)

- 14 Aristotle on praise and blame *cite.
- 15 Readers may wonder why the rationale for moral judgment depends on character, and does not derive from the simpler fact that human actions are voluntary. Any given human action is freely chosen: it could have been otherwise. But if it did not or could not be expected to form part of a pattern of behavior, there would be no great use in assessing it further than its immediate value-significance for *oneself*. In fact, we need to understand the motives of person's actions, and praise or blame him, because his actions may form part of a pattern in the future. But one's habits of action are part of one's character. So it is the role of character in human life that provides the need for moral judgment, even though what we actually evaluate is often a particular action, and not necessarily a long-term pattern of behavior.
- 16 See David Kelley *Truth and Toleration* 9–17 for an extended discussion of the various levels of moral judgment, and the context of information that each requires.
- 17 Because the propriety of tolerance in intellectual exchanges was the issue on which the Institute for Objectivist Studies was founded, it may appear odd to some readers that this book contains no discussion of tolerance as an aspect of justice. However, as the presentation in *Truth and Toleration* explains in greater detail, appropriate tolerance in the realm of ideas is entailed as part of the practice of objective moral judgment, and is recommended as part of a practice of benevolence. In effect, the discussion of tolerance in *Truth and Toleration* is an application of the more general principles of justice and benevolence that we present in this book. In addition to tolerance, there are many minor virtues, such as courage, diligence, punctuality, civility, sensitivity, etc. that are worthy of more extended discussions, but which, however, are not appropriate to this more general work.
- 18 Source* of “to err is human, to forgive divine.”
- 19 See e.g. *Atlas Shrugged* 477
- 20 See Kelley, *Truth and Toleration* 19–23 for a further discussion of moral sanction and existential aid.
- 21 Rand, “The Objectivist Ethics” 34–35
- 22 Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 395
- 23 Saying that ascetics work for self-defeat is an interpretation on Objectivist premises. On their own premises, they would say they are defeating the self as it appears in this world to attain a supernatural goal, such as Nirvana, Grace, etc. This is somewhat complicated in the Buddhist case, since Nirvana could be construed as a state of metaphysical annihilation which is different from death only on the premises of the Hindu/Buddhist metaphysics of reincarnation. These alternative premises are false, but by characterizing asceticism in terms of long-term benefit to the self, the advocates of these doctrines endeavor to ease the psychological strain of self-destructive behavior.

- 24 One reason that it is possible for people to practice asceticism over extended periods is that there are many normal examples of relative self-deprivation in the present as an investment in the future. Any student sacrifices income and other present values to train himself in skills he hopes to benefit from in the future. An athlete must train to attain the peak condition required to succeed in his sport. Once one is acting for a distant benefit, that one grasps only in the abstract, one can move by a series of subtle steps and self-deceptions to acting for a false abstract conception of benefit. Then it is a matter of one's fortitude and inner strength how long one can continue to pursue such an aim without suffering the full brunt of its spiritual and material consequences. There are relatively few genuine ascetics at any given time precisely because of its impracticality.
- 25 The term "altruistic" widely used in some modern philosophical and social science circles to denote any action that benefits others without the direct *quid-pro-quo* of an explicit trade. By this interpretation, giving a gift to valued friend is "altruistic." But this is not the core meaning of "altruism," and in any case it depends on a distinction between explicit trade and other voluntary interactions that addresses the form of the exchange, not its motivation. The essential meaning of altruism is the theory that proper action is for the sake of others. The sacrifice of Christ on the cross, for the sins of all humanity, is the greatest Western model of this ideal. A modern expression is Utilitarianism, which enjoins that one should act to achieve the greatest good for the greatest number.
- 26 This points to an *epistemologically* arbitrary aspect of altruism: on what basis does one choose to help *this* other person, and not that one? One may choose on the basis of an inherited obligation, such as kinship or racial connections, by their nearness or distance, by their sex or age. But however one chooses, the criterion is very likely to be essentially random and groundless.
- 27 See David Kelley "I Don't Have To" *IOS Journal* 6, 1 April 1996 8, for a discussion of approaching one's values from the perspective of agent and beneficiary, and the need to approach one's goals imaginatively.
- 28 Economists and other many other social scientists assume that people act as *psychological egoists*. That is, they assume people never act except with a personal benefit in view. This is an abstraction from the same facts of human behavior that underlie our analysis of *arbitrary* action here. Psychological egoism notices the incoherence and motivational contradiction involved in acting for no personal benefit, but assumes that "benefit" can be construed subjectively. Objectivism notices the same facts, but goes beyond one's subjective preferences to analyze action objectively in terms of its long-term effect on one's life. Preferences (conscious purposes) that are not in synch with one's life needs will result over time in frustration and contradiction because one finds oneself expending effort without experiencing pleasure,

health, efficacy and happiness in response.

Strictly speaking, psychological egoism itself is either false or vacuous. (Cite Joel Feinberg?*) That is, either a) people like kamikaze pilots act without seeing their action as a means to (subjective) personal benefit; or b) anything can be a personal preference and so psychological egoism tells us nothing about human psychology. But perhaps it is a popular thesis because, while it imposes no constraints on human action, it resonates with the evidence of the effects of arbitrary action that we all experience introspectively.

29 We do not discuss in the text supporting diagram 6.5 the possibility of depending one those who survive by dependence. This would simply be circular, having no independent source of values.

30 Knowledge is both impossible to attain without exerting effort on one's own, yet at the same time, widely available for next-to-nothing, the media of communication are inexpensive. One might then propose a "keeping up with the Joneses" kind of intellectual mooching: one blindly adheres to the publicly available opinions and ideas of the general public, on the assumption that these ideas serve the interests of the people who use them, and are therefore likely to be valid. But even this would fail, assuming one could get some sound ideas this way, since one would need to adapt those ideas to one's own circumstances, and one would end up achieving the purposes of others, not oneself. Besides, there is sufficient diversity in society that it would be hard to decide among radically different ideas.

31 Rand, "The Ethics of Emergencies" 44. See also "The Objectivist Ethics" 32

32 See e.g. Charles Murray *Losing Ground: American Social Policy 1950–1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1984) . For a philosophical survey of the history and effects of welfare programs and the concept of welfare "rights" see David Kelley *A Life of One's Own* (Washington: Cato Institute, 1998)

33 e.g. Murray Rothbard (Axiom of non-coercion?)*

34 Some Objectivists (e.g. Darryl Wright Ayn Rand Society paper *) have attempted to argue that force literally "paralyzes the mind." Force does *not* literally paralyze the mind (otherwise, how could Ayn Rand, for instance, have reasoned as a girl in Communist Russia?). But, by alienating one's actions from one's thoughts, it restricts how one can think. Also, by imposing an artificial threat into one's context, it twists the way in which one would apply one's hierarchy of values. Torture and psychological intimidation can also make one come to believe falsehoods, and this affects the mind as does any self-deception (diagram 5.9). So extreme force does end up making rational thought and action virtually impossible, and in this less exact sense it is true that force paralyzes the mind.

35 E.g. Samenow *Inside the Criminal Mind* (*?).

36 One noteworthy example of knowledge obtained by force is the Soviet space program. Here, relative success was attained by providing the key workers

with rewards, leaving intimidation in the background, by providing large amounts of resources, and by having a clear aim based on publicly available technological concepts. But here equally we see the shortcomings of force: unimaginative, inefficient designs, and a program that slowed down as it neared the frontier of known technology.

37 This is a case of properly choosing a strategy *ex ante* that may bind one *ex post* if one finds oneself in unforeseen or extremely unusual circumstances (see note 23* in Chapter 2, and the discussion of integrity in Chapter 5).

38 For a more thorough discussion of the virtue of benevolence and its components, see David Kelley, *Unrugged Individualism*.

39 This is a condensed expression of the principle developed in *Unrugged Individualism*. There, benevolence is summarized as “a commitment to achieving the values derivable from life with other people in society, by treating them as potential trading partners, recognizing their humanity, independence and individuality, and the harmony between their interests and ours.” Here the element of independence is recognized as an aspect of humanity, as is the harmony of interests.

40 *Ibid.* 54.

CHAPTER 7: FREEDOM AND GOVERNMENT

In Chapter 6, we considered the *social ethics* of Objectivism — the principles by which *individuals* should act toward each other. In this chapter, we turn to Objectivism’s *politics* — the principles by which a *society* should be organized. The politics rests on the conclusions of the social ethics, especially the trader principle and justice, because society is only organized by the actions of individuals. However, the focus of the politics is different from that of the social ethics, because its primary concern is not how one should act to gain values, but how society may be organized to provide the best context for fruitful interaction with others.

The trader principle excludes both a life of dependence and a life of coercion, both mooching and looting. We saw that for us as individuals, neither one is a means to a successful life. But a looter, a social predator, is dangerous to us in a way that a beggar is not. We can always ignore a pan-handler or importunate relation, going our own way and leaving the moocher to go his; a mugger with a gun is another matter. Speaking more generally, we can ignore any inducement to act against our own interests, except coercive ones.

The use of force prevents a person from acting on his independent judgment. Because it is both physical and against a person’s will, coercion is the most fundamental intrusion one can make on another person. No idea can kill without being accepted and physically enacted. The shot of a gun or the stab of a knife kills in an instant. Even if it does not kill, coercion interferes with a person’s basic means of survival. As we saw in diagram 6.6, this means that each individual needs freedom from the use of coercive force, for himself. We also saw that each individual benefits when others have that same freedom from force. The need for protection from force, both for ourselves and for others, is the reason we need governmental and legal institutions, and the principles of politics on which they are based.

Political philosophy is a normative study: it is concerned with how social institutions *should be*, not only how they *have been* historically. Traditionally, rights have been seen as arising from many sources: for example, in the *Declaration of Independence*, Jefferson wrote that “we are endowed by our creator with certain unalienable rights...,” citing God as the source of our rights. In fact, there is only one basic normative standard: man’s life, which is the value of his own life to each individual. There is no value outside, beyond or deeper than that. As with the rest of the Objectivist ethics, it is upon the value of one’s own life that we should found our political principles. Only by doing so can we ensure the consistency of politics with our needs as individuals.

Freedom and Rights

Political philosophy is concerned specifically with the institutions necessary for individuals in a social context to achieve the values their lives require. In light of the Objectivist social ethics, it is clear that the goal of such institutions should be to permit and secure a society of independent traders. The essential means to this goal is to ban the initiation of force. Notice the parallel between the structure of politics and that of ethics: in that broader context, one's goal is to achieve happiness, and the means is to live by reason. In both cases, we need more specific principles that provide us with guidance in dealing with the many concrete issues that can arise. In ethics, these principles are *virtues*; in politics, they are *rights*.

A right is a moral principle defining and sanctioning freedom of action in a social context. This definition slightly alters that which Ayn Rand offered in her essay, "Man's Rights."¹ There, Rand went on to comment that:

The concept of a "right" pertains only to action, specifically to freedom of action. It means freedom from physical compulsion, coercion, or interference by other men.

Thus, for every individual, a right is the moral sanction of a *positive*—of his freedom to act on his own judgment, for his own goals, by his own *voluntary, uncoerced* choice. As to his neighbors, his rights impose no obligations on them except of a *negative* kind: to abstain from violating his rights.²

Freedom in the Objectivist view is most fundamentally freedom from coercion. As long as one is free from force, one is still able to exercise one's capacity to choose one's actions rationally. This is what the classical liberals of the Enlightenment and the 19th century meant by freedom.

Critics of classical liberalism have argued that this characterization of freedom is too limited. They point out that we are constrained by our social circumstances and abilities. To put it in modern terms: an American autoworker can afford a trip to Hawaii, whereas a Chinese peasant farmer cannot: is the autoworker more free than the peasant? More generally, aren't the wealthy more free than the poor?

They are, *if* we take "freedom" simply to be the possession of more options, more resources or capacities, more wealth. But why should we take "freedom" to mean things that we already have concepts for, concepts such as "power," "ability," and "opportunity"?³ The trouble with equating freedom with absolute power and total opportunity is that, while it allows us to compare the "freedom" of two people, no one can ever be said to be truly "free." Everyone is limited in his capacities; even the wealthy find resources are scarce for some

things they would like to do, such as buying an island in the Bahamas, or traveling to the moon. By contrast, objective freedom, freedom from coercion, is a real condition that anyone can attain. Furthermore, as we saw last chapter, it is the liberty one needs in order to pursue one's values. A Chinese peasant farmer may be poor, but it is only in a context of freedom from coercion that he will be able to attain the wealth of the American autoworker. The autoworker's wealth depends on his freedom, and could not long persist without it.

Diagram 7.1 examines two threads of the Objectivist argument for rights. In a general way, we might say Objectivism holds that rights are the social conditions required by man's nature as a rational being. But this remains in need of clarification. Any universal moral truth that one can express in terms of "man" may also be expressed distributively, as concerning each individual subsumed under "man." In view of this, our best way of understanding the "needs of man" is by understanding the needs and interests of the individual. One cannot avoid the argument in diagram 7.1 by saying that man's nature requires rights, because the argument in diagram 7.1 is the reasoning behind that very claim.

To establish the propriety of a rights-respecting society for each of us, we must show 1) that each of us needs freedom; and we also have to show 2) that each of us should respect the freedom of others. Fortunately this is not difficult at this stage in our ethical theory. In establishing the trader principle, we have already developed the key premises we need to establish both points (1) and (2). Diagram 7.1 presents them:

Premise 1a states that **to the extent one is subject to force, one cannot act on the basis of reason**. This was premise 3 of diagram 6.6 (non-coercion), and we assessed the evidence for it there. Here, we note that we can infer directly from this conclusion that **to pursue his life by means of reason, an individual needs freedom from force**. This is **Premise 1**, which is the argument from one's *own* need for freedom.

The second line of reasoning picks up the other side of the coin: one's lack of any need to use force to gain values. **Premise 2a** is a summary of the trader principle: **one should interact with others only through trade**. As we saw last chapter, trade is voluntary, while force acts against the will of the victim. Taking this into account, we can conclude from premise 2a that **an individual does not need to use force against others, except in self-defense (Premise 2)**. This is, in essence, the same as saying that there are no conflicting fundamental interests between individuals.

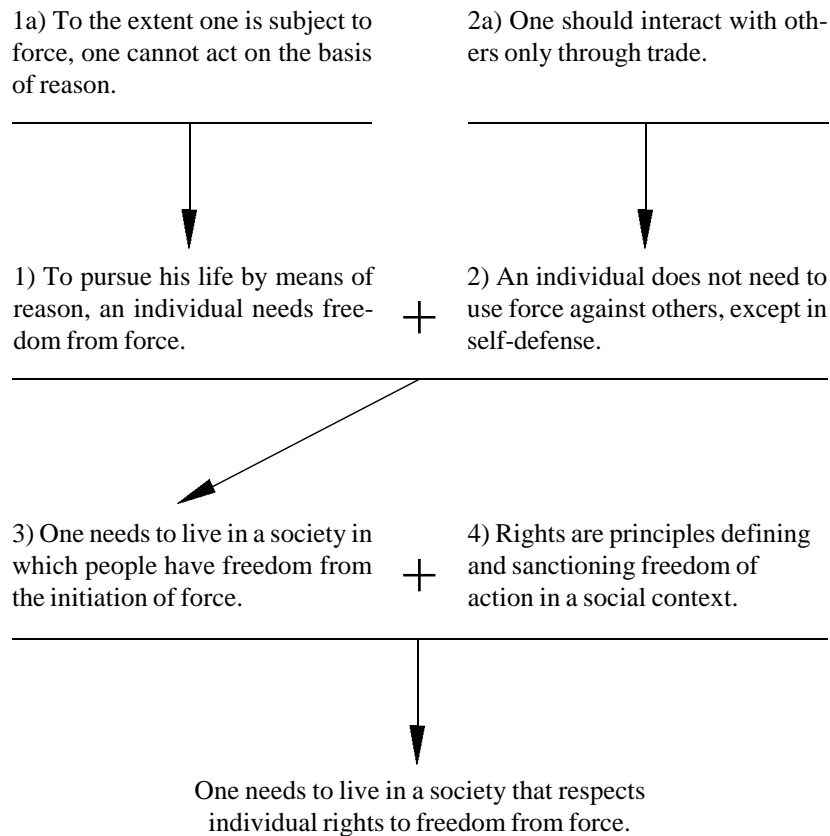
Together, premises 1 and 2 allow us to conclude that the initiation of force against others is never a means to values in society, and is always a threat, both in terms of the needs of the victim of force and in terms of the long-range interests of the person who initiates force. This means that **one needs to live in a society in which people have freedom from force (Premise 3)**. In essence, premise 3 reinterprets the non-coercion principle in terms of the way in which

society should be organized.

So one needs freedom; what does this have to do with rights? **Premise 4** restates the definition of “rights”: **rights are principles defining and sanctioning freedom of action in a social context**. Like any definition, premise 4 is inductive.

Diagram 7.1: Freedom and Rights

Inductive evidence: 4) Political practice, law.



Notice that what “rights” refers to abstractly is a collection of principles, not innate features of man. A right is a principle that defines an aspect of human action over which a person should be free.⁴ Freedom of speech and the right to pursue one’s happiness are examples of this, and as we will see it is true of rights as such. The point to note here is that the ability to take those actions is part of the person’s nature; the rights are not.

As principles, rights are not inherent in things or actions. Contrary to Thomas Jefferson, we are not naturally “endowed” with rights; rather, we recognize that rights properly apply to us in virtue of our natures, in the normal context of life. Thus, to say that a person “has rights” is just a manner of speaking. Similarly, it would be a loose figure of speech to say that an imprisoned criminal has “alienated” his rights; rather, those principles have different implications in the case of a criminal because of the way he has behaved. Nevertheless, rights are objective: they identify facts about how human beings should deal with each other in order to best promote their own individual lives. Rights are like basic principles of engineering for social organization.

Premise 4 points out that rights identify actions that we should be free to perform. This alone does not tell us how to properly determine which actions should be included, and which excluded. By combining premise 3 with premise 4, we can see what is the freedom that rights protect: an action is free when it is free from the initiation of physical force.

Together, premises 3 and 4 allow us to **conclude that one needs to live in a society that respects individual rights to freedom from force**. Rights define actions that it is morally appropriate to leave free from force. For instance, one recognizes another’s right to work, because this is consistent with non-coercion, but one does not recognize the right of another to commit murder, because murder is a species of coercion.

Notice that we conclude with a principle that characterizes actions that *society* should take. Of course, any society is nothing more than the individuals that make it up; its actions are their actions. What our conclusion means is that we need for individual rights to be a norm consistently upheld in society. As we will see when we discuss law and government, it also means that in view of the widespread threat that organized coercion poses to our freedom, we need to organize institutions to enforce respect for our rights. After all, one’s objective, individual rights are inalienable insofar as they identify fundamental facts about human nature, but if society at large ignores them, then they do one little good.

Recognizing the fact that rights are principles allows us to see more clearly what it means, on the Objectivist account, to say that one should *respect* the rights of others. It means that one should act with integrity on one’s principled recognition that the freedom of others is in one’s self-interest, so long as they reciprocate that recognition. Some philosophers think rights are weak and paltry claims if they do not amount to religious injunctions, but what could be

more powerful than an objective principle that connects human freedom to one's deepest needs and dearest values?

Individual rights are the essential principles of political and legal *justice*. We remarked in Chapter 6 that it is a matter of justice to determine what people *deserve*. The trader principle tells us that people deserve what they have earned by their own accomplishments or potential for accomplishment. Rights define the most general regard that people deserve. Rights are the most general because anyone with the capacity to live by reason, production, and trade merits respect for their rights, so long as that person respects the rights of others.⁵ The antithesis of objective political justice is the doctrine of “positive rights,” which holds that others' needs are superior to one's own claim to one's life and produce. As we can see, “positive rights” are not rights at all, since they do not identify actions that should be free, but instead amount to claims to the action, and especially the productive work, of others.⁶

Like all moral principles, rights are absolute, but contextual. In the context of normal life, strangers have the right to pass unmolested. In a combat zone during wartime, by contrast, no such right applies. In addition, as the context of normal life expands to include new technologies and new types of activities, the principles of rights that apply to it should expand as well. For example, today a person may buy a claim to a portion of the radio spectrum, and as owner, he has a right to it. But this depends on technological context: the idea of the radio spectrum as property had to be invented, and the principle of non-coercion had to be extended to apply to it (indeed, in our own discussion we have yet to extend the principle of non-coercion even so far as property: that is the task of diagram 7.2).

Philosophy abounds in scenarios in which rights and self-interest appear to conflict. Many are absurd and most of the rest are rare in real life. Those that occur in normal life, and not in a different context such as a war or a lifeboat, usually involve a misunderstanding of what rights are and what obligations follow from them. For example, imagine finding oneself lost in a blizzard. One stumbles upon a cabin that is posted with a “No Trespassing” sign. An apparent dilemma emerges: should one respect the right that the sign announces, or freeze to death out in the snow?

But this is a false dilemma, one that results from taking rights to be categorical injunctions against certain types of action, rather than contextual principles based on self-interest. Respecting the other's rights in this case would mean being willing to pay compensation for trespassing, and supporting a court system that would hold one accountable. It would not mean sacrificing one's life to avoid infringing on a property claim. Plainly, one's need to respect the rights of another does not trump one's need to preserve one's own life. The fact that life does not normally require such actions, as we have seen, underlies the propriety of respecting rights. When the context is radically different, then the principles

that follow from it will naturally be different as well.⁷

The Objectivist argument for rights depends on a large context of ethical theory and induction from human nature. Couldn't there be a more direct approach to showing the propriety of rights? Several libertarian philosophers in recent years have argued that rights are founded on our recognition of the fact that others are moral ends-in-the-themselves.⁸ Every living thing is an end-in-itself: its life is its own ultimate value. This, however, is only part of the point these philosophers intend. Man is also a conceptual being, who must choose his actions on the basis of moral principles. He is thus a *moral* end-in-himself. Might this status alone give every person the right to a sphere of action in which to pursue moral ends? Would denying him rights wipe out morality?

There is nothing in morality itself, nor in moral action itself—as distinct from the facts of social life—that imposes a duty on others.⁹ To understand the full import of the fact that others are moral ends-in-the-themselves we must consider the kind of facts we been discussing in this book: facts about rationality, free will, needs, values, and the role of moral philosophy in human life. Since, as we have seen, those facts do not entail a moral duty or obligation to others except in virtue of the ability of people to live by reason, production, and trade, there are no grounds for moral obligations based *directly* on the fact that others are moral ends-in-the-themselves.¹⁰

Noting that people are moral ends-in-the-themselves is a satisfying rhetorical device that resonates with one's benevolent sense of others as independent individuals worthy of generosity, sensitivity, civility and rights. It may even seem obvious that one should respect others' rights, since in daily life we experience the value of dealing with others by trade in almost every interaction. None of this, however, allows us to leap directly to rights theory without first attending to the more fundamental ethical issues of value and virtue that underlie it.

Property Rights

Legal theorists have distinguished many kinds of rights, and even created some new ones as new technology and circumstances have arisen. The United States Constitution distinguishes a variety of rights: the right to freedom of speech, to bear arms, to due process of law, and so on. Many theorists see no clear connection between these rights and are as happy to speak of "rights" (such as welfare "rights", or the "right" to health care) that impose positive obligations on others in the same breath as individual rights, which consist only in negative obligations to refrain from interfering with others.

Objectivism, on the other hand, has a unified theory of rights. As Ayn Rand put it:

The right to life is the source of all rights—and the right to property is

their only implementation. Without property rights, no other rights are possible. Since man has to sustain his life by his own effort, the man who has no right to the product of his effort has no means to sustain his life. The man who produces while others dispose of his product is a slave.¹¹

Objectivism's theory of rights is unified in two ways: 1) like any moral principles, rights serve the ultimate value of life; 2) because one's freedom in a social context can only be violated by force, all rights identify freedoms to forms of non-coercive action. We saw in Chapter 5 that, in essence, Objectivism has only one virtue: rationality. We need further principles of action —other virtues— to apply the principle of rational action in the various aspects and contexts of life. Similarly, Objectivism recognizes only one fundamental right: the right to one's life, free from force. The right to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,” so hallowed in American tradition, should be understood as nothing more or less than this one right. We need further principles of rights to apply the right to life to the situations we encounter in society: freedom of speech because we need to communicate, freedom of assembly because we need to gather together for social purposes, and so on.¹²

Of these principles that apply the right to life in the more particular circumstances of human life, the most fundamental kind are one's property rights. Property rights are moral and legal claims to the use of objects, primarily material objects. These are the most fundamental both because we need to be able to use property if we are to engage in production and trade — and thereby acquire material values—, and also because any other right we might exercise depends on the right to use some property, just as most non-material values require material means of some sort. For instance, one exercises freedom of speech through the press, which requires the ownership of means of printing, such as printers and computers. To exercise freedom of assembly, one must be able to use the space in which one assembles.

Diagram 7.2 presents two lines of argument for property rights, (A) and (B), that correspond to these two points:

The first line of argument proceeds from the need to produce and trade material values. **Premise A1** states that **in order to live successfully, one needs to satisfy one's needs by producing and trading for material values**. This simply restates conclusions we reached in discussing productiveness and trade. Note, however, that in the sense of this premise, “material values” include both values that fulfill fundamental material needs, such as food, and other values that take material form, such as objects of art.

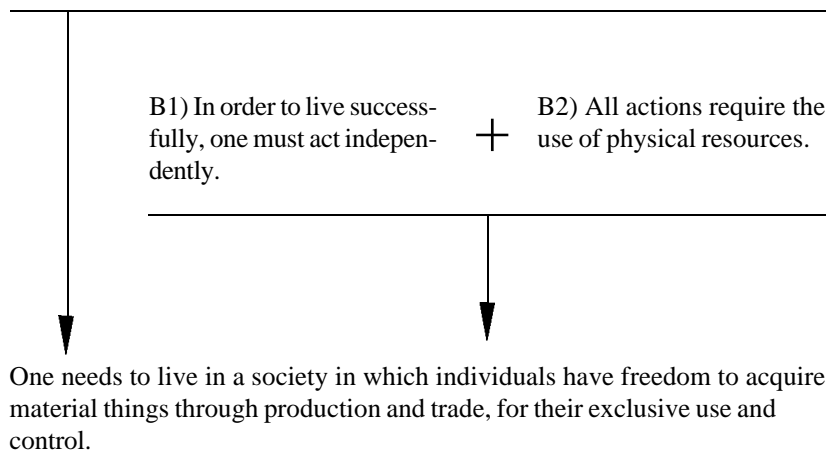
Premise A2 adds the inductive claim that **to the extent that one cannot dispose of what one produces or obtains from trade, one cannot satisfy one's needs by production and trade**. This claim has widespread evidence in

the field of economics, and of course in one's personal experience. Production and trade require the ability to use and dispose of material goods, not just the ability to create them. As evidence of this, we have the cases of oppressed societies, such as China during its "Great Leap Forward" of the late 1950s, where freedom of exchange was curtailed while production was itself explicitly encouraged. The result in the "Great Leap Forward" was the failure of both production and trade, and widespread starvation ensued. We equally have numerous examples, such as the trade entrepôts of Hong Kong and Singapore, where freedom to engage in exchange—in their case overseas mercantile exchange—resulted in the production of values on a fantastic scale. There are many other examples, but the point of them all is that production in a social context requires the freedom to own and trade material goods if it is to be fruitful.

Diagram 7.2: Property Rights

Inductive evidence: A2) economics, personal experience

A1) In order to live successfully, one needs to satisfy one's needs by producing and trading for material values. + A2) To the extent that one cannot dispose of what one produces or obtains from trade, one cannot satisfy one's needs by production and trade.



Together with the point that coercion is not a reliable means of obtaining values (of which we were reminded in diagram 7.1), premises A1 and A2 give us one line of argument to the **conclusion** of diagram 7.2: **one needs to live in a society in which individuals have freedom to acquire material things through production and trade, for their exclusive use and control.**

There is a second line of argument for property rights that derives from one's need for independence in pursuing all one's values. **Premise B1** reminds us that **in order to live successfully, one must act independently.** This summarizes the arguments for the virtue of independence that we discussed in diagrams 6.1 and 6.5. **Premise B2** adds the obvious point that **all actions require the use of physical resources.** This observation underlies the point we noted in Chapter 3, that material values are logically fundamental. Together, premises B1 and B2 give us a distinct line of argument to our **conclusion.**

In introducing the idea of rights in diagram 7.1, we noted that rights refer primarily to actions. This is true of property rights as well. People normally consider property rights to be *claims* on things, such as the title to a house or car, or one's ownership of clothes, groceries, and so on. In our society, the ownership of property conveys only restricted freedom to use and dispose of the goods in question. Property rights identify and sanction that freedom. Thus, property rights are the rights to acquire, use, and dispose of physical goods free from coercive interference or restriction. Without the right to those actions, legal ownership is a vacuous concept.

In this century, perhaps no aspect of individual rights has been as neglected by governments and philosophers as property rights. This neglect is a symptom of a deeper philosophical disease: the widespread acceptance of the mind-body dichotomy. This false distinction between the exalted realm of spirit and the base realm of matter is reflected, for example, in the 20th Century approach to rights, with its commonplace distinction between personal and economic freedom. In current American constitutional jurisprudence, it is widely believed sufficient that one be allowed to think what one likes, regardless of one's freedom to act in the world on that basis. In fact, one's spiritual values require material form, just as one's mind is a part of one's body. Because of this, one's right to property is the basic means of securing one's freedom of thought. As evidence, consider the fact that while the press is protected in many capitalistic, welfare state societies, historically countries that have not recognized property rights have neither upheld the freedom of the press.¹³

Government and Law

We have concluded that we need freedom from the initiation of physical force, including the freedom to use and own property, to be respected in society. We need this respect for ourselves, and we need to accord it to others.

On the other hand, we have noted that it is perfectly appropriate to use physical force in defense of oneself or one's property. So the application of the principle that people have rights has a certain complexity: it is far easier to determine if one person is *using* force on another than to determine whether or not that use of force is *justified*.

Furthermore, there is no guarantee that people will act for their long-term self-interest and thus abjure the initiation of force. Historically, there have always been plenty of people who have been attracted to theft or the idea of holding power over others, or who adopt a social cause that induces them to try to force others to conform. To handle these complexities, we need a method for establishing whether a given instance of force is legitimate. The law provides this method. But law is a body of principles: it cannot directly affect actions in the world. So we also need an institution to implement judgments based on law, and to protect us from powerful predators. This institution is government.

A government is an institution that establishes social rules within a geographic area, enforces them coercively, and cannot be challenged with impunity.¹⁴ We may describe government as possessing "exclusive" control over the use of force, but this is in reality a short-hand for dominance. A government possesses final legal authority over the use of force in its territory, but in practice force is often exercised in self-defense as well as by criminals, without prior authorization of government. The subjects of a government may consider it legitimate, or they may not. Some governments rest on popular sovereignty, others are tyrannies.

As with any institution, the first question one should ask of government is whether it should exist at all. Do the facts of reality indicate that we need government? Libertarian anarchists argue that the coercive powers vested in any government are a threat to the liberty of the people and should be abolished. They suggest that we instead create a "marketplace" for rights protection. Speaking roughly, in such a system it is supposed that one would hire courtrooms, judges and police as one needed them, or perhaps in an "insurance" package. Competition among various "justice agencies," proponents hold, will guarantee the rule of law and fair play.¹⁵

The trouble with this view is that rights are the precondition of a true marketplace: economic theories of the beneficence of competition assume a context of rights in which one can use and dispose of one's goods. Furthermore, competition over the power to enforce law usually takes an unpleasant, if familiar, form: war. It is not clear how the competition that has always existed among governments, rebels, and criminals could be different from the "competition" that is supposed to shape the law in the anarchist utopia, yet that competition has not often resulted in forms of governance that correspond well to the anarchist proposal. In an anarchy, there are no rules to restrain the competition, to prevent the use of the military power that modern states employ to secure their positions.

After all, what is being competed over is the power to set social rules. The victor determines what those rules will be.

In fact, it is the very danger of the process of competition for power that gives us reason to form a government that is strong enough to withstand challengers, yet structured so as to protect our rights. We need an institution charged with securing our rights: the alternative is to leave our rights vulnerable to the strongest thug, the most well-armed generalissimo. A limited government is that institution. It must be a government because government fulfills two essential functions: it makes possible an objective, rights-based system of law, and it provides the power to reliably enforce that law. We examine these points, respectively, in Diagrams 7.3 and 7.4.

Diagram 7.3 presents the argument that law requires government:

Premise 1 rephrases the conclusions of diagrams 7.1 and 7.2: **individuals have rights to freedom from force**. As we have noted, this is the basic principle of the Objectivist politics. It serves as the normative premise of our argument.

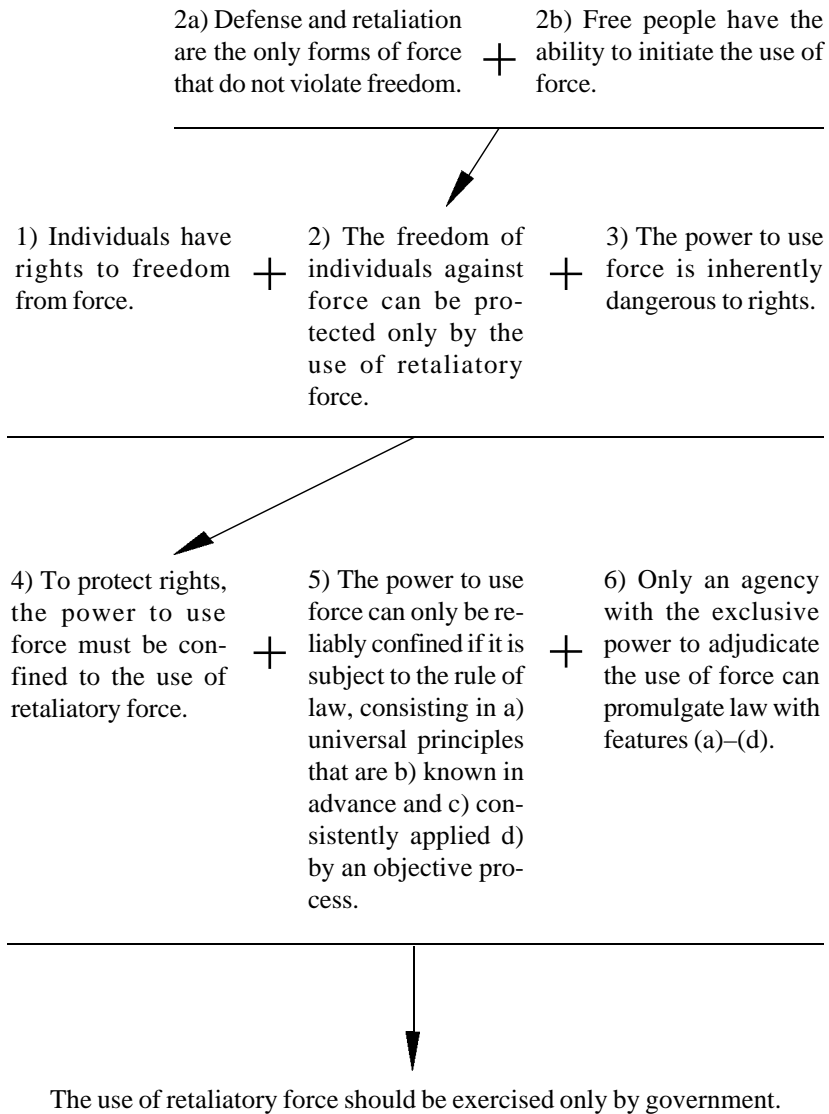
The line of argument that leads to premise 2 establishes the form of force that government should use, namely: retaliatory force. **Premise 2a** states that **defense and retaliation are the only forms of force that do not violate freedom**. This is an inference from the nature of freedom. Freedom is violated by the initiation of physical force. But one may properly defend oneself and one's property by force, if one is being attacked. In addition, it is proper to use force in retaliation for an act of force, to recover lost property or to punish a violent wrong-doer. After all, others only merit respect for their freedom as long they themselves offer that respect.

Premise 2b states that **free people have the ability to initiate the use of force**. This premise is inductive. In a society based on freedom, people will always be able to initiate force if they choose to attempt it. The stranger on the sidewalk can always punch his neighbor, for example. Many violent acts are facilitated by tools that have other, peaceful uses. For instance, explosives have many productive uses, but can easily be used to attack people and their property as well.

The only way to absolutely rule out the initiation of force by others, or at least to restrict it to minor forms such as bare-handed attacks, would be to restrict people's freedom to engage in activities that enable them to initiate force. But to do so would be to restrict their freedom to engage in non-predatory activities, activities which are properly within their rights. Consider for instance a ban on the possession of overt weapons. Many weapons have uses other than inflicting force on people. A knife can be used to initiate force, for example, but it has many other uses as well, including cooking, carpentry, self-defense, and so on. Furthermore, a weapon is as much a means to legitimate self-defense as it is a means to the initiation of force. So we can see that it is not possible to render man

Diagram 7.3: Government and Law

*Inductive evidence: 2a), 5) & 6) legal theory, history 2b) medicine
3) History, political theory*



incapable of initiating force without deeply infringing on his freedom to pursue his own life and happiness.

We can infer from premises 2a and 2b that we need to deal with the human ability to initiate force, without inappropriately restricting our freedom. Besides defending ourselves when the need arises, our only other method of conclusively responding is by retaliating against and enforcing appropriate punishments on those who use force.¹⁶ **Premise 2** states this intermediate conclusion as follows: **the freedom of individuals against force can be protected only by the use of retaliatory force.**

A pacifist might argue that premise 2 neglects the possibility of moral suasion: since force is not a reliable means of gaining values, could we not reliably appeal to the self-interest of a violent offender, and avoid the use of force altogether? The trouble with this is, as Mao ZeDong said —and who should know better?— “Power flows from the barrel of a gun.”¹⁷ In other words, moral suasion cannot be counted on to stay the hand of a predator who chooses to disregard the pacifist’s arguments. By contrast, the predator’s violence *can* be counted on to end the pacifist’s life. It is in the putative pacifist’s interest to back up his moral suasion with the more formidable protection of retaliatory force.

Premise 3 adds another inductive premise: **the power to use force is inherently dangerous to rights.** To the extent that people can use force with impunity, they are also able to use it to encroach on the freedom of others. The history of monarchy is ample evidence of this principle: in the traditional monarchy, the ruler’s power is justified by his guardianship of the people, and his role in enforcing the law. History abounds in monarchs who, being in a position of dominant power, abused their trust. We have seen a similar process in democratic states, where politicians have been able to extend the reach of the state into every aspect of life, on the basis of specious promises to improve the public welfare or stave off a threat to security. In genuine situations of anarchy, premise 2 is played out on a daily basis, as the dominant gang of the moment extracts what it can from its subjects.¹⁸

Together, premises 1, 2, and 3 allow us to infer that **to protect rights, the power to use force must be confined to the use of retaliatory force.** This is **Premise 4.** This is to say that unless that power is so confined, it is as likely to prove of harm as of help.

Premise 5 describes the means of achieving this end: **the power to use force can only reliably be confined if it is subject to the rule of law, consisting in a) universal principles that are b) known in advance and c) consistently applied d) by an objective process.** This is an inductive claim drawn from centuries of legal practice. The rule of law is the basis of an objective, rights-respecting legal code.¹⁹

The rule of law consists in law that is (a) *universal*, so that everybody has a determinate standing before it. It must be (b) *known in advance*, because

one cannot be held responsible for violating a principle one could not have known of. It must be (c) *consistently applied*, simply as a matter of logic: to do otherwise would introduce whim and subjectivity to any attempt at adjudication. Finally, it must be (d) applied *by an objective process*. This means a process of established procedures and methods, based on the analysis of facts. This is another preservation against whimsy and distortion, and is essential to ensuring that the law proceed in a rational manner.

The rule of law is not *sufficient* to ensure that the use of force is restricted to retaliation, but it is *necessary* to it. Each basic aspect of the rule of law is a prerequisite of any attempt to enforce consistent political principles. Since rights are a species of consistent political principles, the rule of law is a prerequisite for a political system that respects rights. Some political philosophers have held that the rule of law is sufficient to ensure a just political system.²⁰ This represents an inversion of logical priority, since the worth of the law derives from its role in a rights-based political order, not on any intrinsic merit it possesses. Certainly the rule of law is not itself enough to guard one against tyranny; oppressive laws may be as universal, and may be applied as objectively, as any other sort.

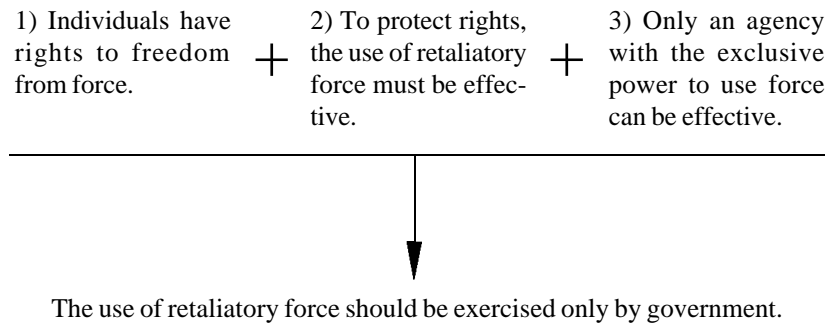
Premise 6 adds the following claim: **only an agency with the exclusive power to use force can promulgate law with features (a)-(d)**. The reasoning behind this is inductive, and is based on historical and political experience. We can capture the underlying causality by the following thought experiment: imagine that two distinct agencies attempted to apply unrelated legal systems to one population. It would not be clear which legal system applied to which person, item, or act. The uncertainty about the law in any case where the two had different provisions would mean that in fact the law would not be consistently applied by an objective process. Thus the rule of law could not hold, to say nothing of the potential conflicts that would erupt among the respective officials attempting to enforce the two different sets of laws. As an instance of this, consider the overlapping church and feudal legal systems of the Middle Ages, which were in violent conflict with one another almost continually.²¹

Together, premises 4, 5, and 6 allow us to infer the **conclusion** of diagram 7.3: **the use of retaliatory force should be exercised only by government**. A government, by this line of argument, is necessary because it provides the framework in which the use of force can be subjected to law.

Government also allows for the enforcement of law, by means of the effective application of retaliatory force. This second line of argument is represented in Diagram 7.4. It begins with **Premise 1: individuals have rights to freedom from force**. As in diagram 7.3, this provides the normative force to our argument. After all, we are not interested in politics for its own sake, but in order to secure our freedom to live.

Diagram 7.4: Government and Efficacy

Inductive evidence: 2) & 3) history, political theory



Premise 1 combines with premises 2 and 3 as an argument for the establishment of government. **Premise 2** states that **to protect rights, the use of retaliatory force must be effective**. This is obvious. If the use of retaliatory force is not effective, then it can hardly deter crime, nor enforce punishments and compensation for crimes committed.

Premise 3 states the additional inductive point that **only an agency with the exclusive power to use force can be effective**. If criminals can resist the imposition of retaliatory force with impunity, then it can hardly be said to be effective. An agency that cannot be resisted with impunity is one that has the exclusive ultimate power to use force. Such an agency is a government. In history, we see that societies in which freedom has flourished have had effective, if limited government. Civil wars and other anarchic situations have tended to result in the decay in law enforcement and rights protection. Thus, we again have our **conclusion: the use of retaliatory force should be exercised only by government**.

If retaliatory force should be exercised exclusively by the government, what about self-defense? This argument from effectiveness could not lead us to conclude that the government should have exclusive control over that use of force, because self-defense is used in cases of immediate need. If a murderer breaks into one's house, one does not have time to wait for the police to show up. In many cases, only the threatened individual or others at hand are in a position to effectively use force in defense. In such cases, the only effective protection can come from those on hand to provide it.

The role of government in establishing law requires that we qualify the right to use force in self-defense. The role of the law is to ensure that all uses of force are objectively monitored so that any initiation of force can be properly punished. The basic means in law of doing this is to establish procedures for the use of force, and to require that any use of force be shown to fall within the law. For this reason, except in emergencies, the individual must subject his desire to act in self-defense to due process of law. One should not arrange a retaliatory assassination on one's own, for example. If there is time for planning, there is time for a hearing before the law. Any time one uses force in self-defense, one will naturally be required to prove the claim of self-defense in court. Thus, to ensure the rule of law, the government will *oversee* acts of self-defense, while recognizing that, for reasons of efficacy, they must be permitted.

To be effective, government need not be monolithic, except in its ultimate, enforceable legal procedures. It may—and probably should!—be composed of various branches or agencies. It may allow substantial room for private provision of arbitration, detectives and guards. Within limits, it could have competing courts or police agencies. It can incorporate federalist decentralization. Nevertheless, to enforce the rule of law, a government needs a unified set of procedures, founded in law, that establish which branch of government or agent is entitled to use force in which circumstances. To do this, the system of government must be overseen by a central government of some sort with the power to enforce its rules against foreign threats and domestic criminals.

Limited Government

In forming a government, or revising an existing one, a central concern is to see that it does not become the source of coercive oppression that so many governments have become. As diagram 7.5 quite straightforwardly shows, a government that is itself an agent of coercion is improperly constituted:

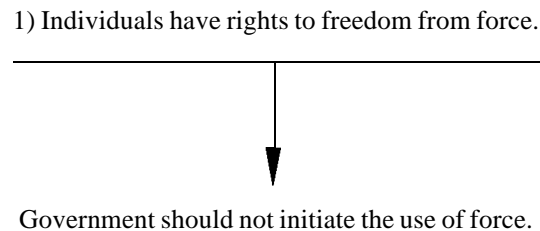
Premise 1 of diagram 7.5 repeats the first premise of diagram 7.3: **individuals have rights to freedom from force**. Although government is an institution that enforces rules coercively, i.e., by using force, it is subject to moral principles. One of those principles is premise 1, which directly implies that **government should not initiate the use of force**. This **conclusion** follows because government is a social institution. Being human, its members are no different from other people in their need to adhere to correct moral principles, in this case, the principle of respecting rights.²²

Achieving a government that fulfills its proper function without overstepping its bounds is a challenging matter, and has been the subject of an immense body of political theory. Not least among this material is the doctrine of separation of powers, and the concept of a government constituted in terms of strictly enumerated powers. These were both employed in the founding of the

United States of America, and although implemented imperfectly, have showed promising results. Exploration of the means of limiting government takes us beyond the scope of this book. Here it is sufficient to note the importance of the principle that government should be so restrained so that it remains the guardian of freedom that it should be.

Diagram 7.5: Limited Government

Inductive evidence: No new evidence.



Conclusion

We have now established the essential principles of the Objectivist politics: that people's rights to life, liberty and property should be respected by all, and that we need a limited government to secure those rights against threats foreign and domestic. From this base, we can discern the outlines of a fresh approach to politics and law, that extends the founding principles of the United States in a rigorous and fully consistent manner. The work to extend this conception of politics, and the other principles of the philosophy of Objectivism, can take the systematic understanding of the system as its launching pad.

-
- 1 Ayn Rand, “Man’s Rights” in *The Virtue of Selfishness* 93. Rand’s definition of “right” is: “A ‘right’ is a moral principle sanctioning a man’s freedom of action in a social context.” Our definition notes that rights define ranges of action (e.g. freedom of speech, or e.g. all non-coercive action), and leaves the identification of “man” as the rights bearer implicit.
 - 2 Ibid.
 - 3 See Kelley, *A Life of One’s Own* 66–71 for an extended comparison of these different conceptions of freedom.
 - 4 One might think of a right as identifying a *range* of actions rather than an *aspect* of human action. Freedom speech gives us a right to a way in which we act: communication. This is an aspect of the total variety of human action possible. It also subsumes a range of actions: talking to Joe, writing to Jane, etc. etc.
 - 5 Why are rights more general than other principles of desert? Consider the following story: Jane goes shopping in Joe’s store, because it is next to her house, but finds he offers shoddy merchandise. As a trader, she buys elsewhere, but treats Joe with civility as a matter of basic benevolence. She happens to learn that Joe is an activist for an influential millenarian cult when he rudely lectures her for refusing a pamphlet on the proximate end of everything. In time, Jane knows Joe well enough to conclude that he is not a reasonable person: he practices deception, has little regard for his customers or workers, is lazy and dogmatic. Even at this stage, when Jane would have nothing to do with Joe, would boycott his store, and would even condemn him morally for his irrationality, still she should recognize that Joe has the right to live free from force, so long as he does not initiate force himself.
 - 6 See Kelley, *A Life of One’s Own* for a thorough Objectivist critique of “positive” rights. See also Smith, *Moral Rights and Political Freedom*, 165–184 for a discussion of positive rights from an Objectivist perspective.
 - 7 It is an implication of the Objectivist ethics that if one found oneself in a situation in which it plainly was in one’s self-interest to not to respect the property or life of another, then one should follow one’s self-interest. However, life in society is a complex, long-term process. On top of the rarity of such situations in general, there would remain the epistemological problem of identifying them with certainty. Furthermore, as we remarked last chapter, over the course of one’s life one should develop a character which may cause one attend more to opportunities for trade than to opportunities for predation. One’s character will thus tend to make it even more difficult to recognize an opportunity for predation, and to act effectively on it. So, far from preparing one to act as a rapacious wolf, the ethics of self-interest, in the normal context

- of life, would tend to cause one to default to respecting the lives and property of others, even in occasional cases where such respect was not warranted.
- 8 As exemplars of the ends-in-themselves argument, see Robert Nozick, *Anarchy State and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974) 50, basing his individualism on the “meaning of life” resident in each individual, and Eric Mack, “Personal Integrity, Practical Recognition and Rights,” *The Monist* 76 (Where: who, when*) 101–118. Here (and in several other essays, *cite?) Mack argues that one is obligated to respect the rights of others out of recognition of their status as moral ends-in-themselves.
- 9 It is an interesting philosophical puzzle whether conflicts of interest could exist between moral ends-in-themselves. Since we know of only one species of moral ends-in-themselves, this must be a hypothetical rather than empirical matter. Imagine the life of a vampire, for instance, who depends daily on the fruits of predation from others (this example is due to Eyal Mozes). As a rational being, could the vampire come to rely on trade with donors of fresh blood? If he had no blood transfusion technology, or if the donors refused all offers of “blood money,” the vampire would need to assault them to get the blood. Since one’s reason is the basis for one’s need for morality, it might be argued that all moral beings can necessarily live by production and trade. However, as the vampire example shows, the ability to live by production and trade depends on other facts in addition to one’s rationality and need for morality, such as one’s dietary requirements and one’s level of technological sophistication.
- 10 One argument that Mack has used is to note that A’s claiming rights as moral principles, while denying them to B, is inconsistent. Since morality is presumably uniform and universal, A’s position cannot be moral. Of course, the weight in this argument is due to the idea that morality must be uniform and universal. In medieval Christian morality, rulers were considered to have rights and prerogatives distinct from those of their subjects: this was not inconsistent with the idea of morality. In any case, it is hard to see why any person should have a duty to hold to a morality that is not in his self-interest. As we have seen, in Chapter 4, the need for morality is a *founded* in one’s self-interest. Again, there is no short-cut to rights to be found here.
- 11 Rand, “Man’s Rights,” “93
- 12 Certain economists and legal theorists discuss rights as bundles of claims. For instance, ownership of a car includes the right to use it, the right to sell it, the right to dispose of it. If one rents the car, one only acquires the “use-right.” This is a valid method of analysis of different forms of contact and claims. However, the fundamental right to life is not built up as a bundle: it may be analyzed as one, but its role in ethics is as a whole.
- 13 c.f. Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, (*on effects of communism etc. on freedom of speech)

- 14 This definition is due to Roger Donway. Ayn Rand's definition is similar, but less precisely phrased: "A government is an institution that holds the exclusive power to enforce certain rules of social conduct."
- 15 Cites on anarcho-capitalism*. E.g. Randy Barnett *The Structure of Liberty* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998). See also Bruce Benson *The Enterprise of Law* (Where: who, when).
- 16 Punishments for crime might include compensation to the victims as well as measures recommended out of concern for justice or to deter future crime. This is a topic for more specialized analysis than we can offer here.
- 17 Mao on power from gun (cite*)
- 18 Beirut, Lebanon in the late 1970s, or Somalia in the early 1990s, are instances of "genuine anarchy," i.e. situations where no effective government exists.
- 19 Cites on basis of rule of law claims *
- 20 Friedrich Hayek is the most notable exponent of the sufficiency of the rule of law for justice. (Cite*)
- 21 Some anarchist theorists (e.g. Benson*) cite the persistence of both the church and feudal legal systems in the Middle Ages as evidence of that competing governments could coexist fruitfully. Since the rise of capitalism and the eclipse of these systems in favor of national legal systems were concurrent, while the industrial revolution occurred only after the Church had lost its effective independence, especially in the Protestant North, the facts of the case support the Objectivist argument on anarchism, not the anarchist theory. There is a distinct lesson one can draw from European history, a lesson on the value of decentralization of power and the dangers of autocracy, but this is not *prima facie* evidence for anarchism either, since neither centralization nor autocracy are characteristics of the classical liberal form of government.
- 22 This is an area where interesting research is ongoing, particularly on various means of financing government without explicit taxation. Ayn Rand suggested a charge for contracts, or a lottery. The former concept has been more developed in terms of citizenship fees that entitle the payer to various government services.



CONCLUSION

Now we stand on the top of the edifice, looking down. Hopefully, you now have a grasp of how the struts fit together, and where the foundation is; you can see which principles are crucial, and which are ancillary. Now you see Objectivism as a system of ideas.

As we have proceeded together through the logical structure of the philosophy, we have accumulated the inductive evidence for the view of life and man that was distinctively Ayn Rand's. With this full context in mind, we can return to the basic concepts of her philosophy and fully grasp their significance. We see the objective implications of concepts such as *knowledge*, *reason*, *survival*, *life*, *production*, and *character* for personal morality and social order, because we have amassed the evidence of those implications, and traced out the connections that lead from one idea to the next.

Feedback Loops

Although we have insisted at various points that one's personal hierarchy of values should reflect the importance of various values for one's own life and purposes, and should certainly not duplicate the logical hierarchy of justification that we have traced in this book, we have not had an opportunity to reflect explicitly on importance. Inasmuch as this book concerns universal facts, and not the particular circumstances of our distinct lives, we cannot meaningfully analyze the relative importance of particular values here. However, we can promote some reflection on the difference between logical structure and importance, by tracing some feedback loops to principles we established earlier.

When we surveyed the cardinal values in Chapter 4, we noted that they integrate basic aspects of human living action. Now that we have traced out most of ethics and politics from that inductive base, enriching our understanding of human nature in the process, we can return to those values with a rich sense of their content as guides that orient us in life. We can see that *reason* requires honesty, independence, and freedom from force; that one's *purposes* imply a commitment to enact them (productiveness); and that one's need to value *oneself* entails a commitment to pride.

Productiveness and pride are both virtues that have been enriched, for their own part, by integrations we have made since we originally justified them. We have seen in Chapter 6 that only when we grasp the importance of trade as a social ethic, and see the need for a commitment to existential independence, are we able to flesh out what productiveness means in practice. *Productiveness* is, in its broadest sense (diagram 5.7), *the commitment to taking responsibility for achieving one's values*. To this *existential independence* (diagram 6.5) adds: *...by one's own effort!* And *the trader principle* (diagram 6.7) contributes: *...and*

by creating value for voluntary exchange with others to mutual benefit. Recognizing the importance of trade buttresses the argument for *productive work* (diagram 5.5) as well. It is only when we look at productiveness in this full context that we begin to see what it means to take *responsibility* for one's values, and the thoroughgoing, vital importance of this virtue in daily life as the principle of purpose in action.

We discussed pride at the end of Chapter 5, because one would need pride even if one lived alone in a wilderness. But as we noted in discussing *cognitive independence* (diagram 6.1), in society our pride is empty without the conviction that we truly have acted by our own judgment, and therefore may take credit for our accomplishments as individuals. Psychologically, pride—through the self-esteem it achieves—is a buttress against society in one's own mind, a means of recognizing and appreciating what is individual and distinct in oneself. This is why when people say someone is “proud,” they often mean that person is self-sufficient, that he takes profound satisfaction and happiness from his own doings, his own achievements, his own life. In fact, pride is the crown not only of the virtues that pertain exclusively to the individual, but of all the moral principles we have enunciated. One can, and should, take pride in one's respect for the rights of others, and take pride by upholding one's own rights. A person who lives by trade is a proud person, one who appreciates his own worth and takes both spiritual credit and material cash for what he provides to others. Our pride directs us to acts of benevolence, as instances of magnanimity.¹ Finally, as a moral compass, pride directs us not merely to aspire to the benevolent society of freedom, but more profoundly to become the kind of person who exemplifies the principles that flourish in such a society.

To integrate the values and virtues we have discussed here into your own particular circumstances, you will need reflect on the ways in which they play out in your life. For this task, this book can provide you with a method, but only you have the additional inductive evidence that is needed, and it is only to you that the ultimate benefit redounds.

A Flourishing Life

During our discussion of the foundations of ethics in Chapter 2, we criticized an interpretation of Rand's position known as “Flourishing.” This thesis holds that virtues such as honesty, rationality, integrity and respect for others' freedom are all constituent aspects of a human life well-lived.² Since the human life well-lived is the goal of ethics, the rational recognition of the constitutive character of these virtues is sufficient, in the “flourishing” view, to specify the content of morality. The trouble with this position as its usually stated is that it takes for granted that which most needs demonstration, namely what it is that the human life well-lived consists in. One would need to demonstrate what “well-

lived” (as opposed to “poorly lived”) amounts to. One would need to show what values the successful life entails, and demonstrate how each of the virtues contributed to that life. Only in this way would one have rational grounds for regarding any particular capacity or good as a means (either constitutive or instrumental) to the good life.

The arguments that we have diagrammed and examined in this book accomplish that task. We have taken the concept of “value” down to its roots in the conditional nature of life. We have related this survival-based, biocentric conception of value to our emotional experience of benefit and harm, and — most notably— to happiness, which is the psychological concomitant and reward of success in maintaining one’s life. We have seen how production provides the bridge between our material needs and the spiritual needs for reason, philosophy, art, and love that are commonly recognized as the glories of the human experience. We have seen that we need integrity and a healthy moral character, and that the virtues actually support our lives in the most basic sense. We have seen that there is no contradiction between justifying our values and virtues logically as *practical means* to life, on the one hand, and appreciating them emotionally as powerfully important *personal ideals*, on the other. This is how one’s commitment to respect the freedom of others can be at once something one recognizes as a means to one’s survival, and the most basic form of desert that one accords to other human beings.

In short, we have shown that a life lived so as to enhance one’s chances of survival is a life well-lived, a happy life, a flourishing life. For each of us the ongoing challenge, and glory of our existence, is to go on flourishing.

Living Principles

In closing, the authors would like to note that we hope the logical structure of Objectivism will flourish much as living beings do. This work summarizes many complex and abstract issues, including vast ranges of inductive evidence that we could not address here at any level of detail. To a great degree addressing that evidence the task of specialized researchers in the various disciplines we have cited in the diagrams and the text. As a living set of ideas, we expect that that the perusal of the diagrams in this book will suggest fruitful areas for further research on and development of the philosophy of Objectivism. There are numerous interesting technical issues that we could only touch on in a note here or brief sentence there, and many we could not address at all. There is more work to be done on this edifice; we hope this book will help others to do some of it.

We hope as well that our readers will approach the arguments and diagrams herein as work-in-progress. We do not mean this as a confession of uncertainty, but as an expression of our hope that you will bring your own, first-hand

perspective to the logical structure. The purpose of the diagrams is to help you see the connections between the ideas; to grasp the connections, one needs to be willing to imagine alternatives both in substance and in degree of abstraction. Even though we expect you will find that what we argued is true, we hope you will do so by your own process of validation. In many ways, validation of these ideas is a process that continues indefinitely as one acquires new inductive evidence and reaches new integrations. That's how it is with living ideas: they can grow and change.

Objectivism is not merely a body of theory for contemplation. It is a body of practical principles for living the good life. So we most especially hope to see the fruit that your systematic understanding of the philosophy will bear as you apply it to your life, and promote it in society at large. Live it, and teach us all by your example.

¹ Kelley, *Unrugged Individualism* 44–45

² E.g. Rasmussen and Den Uyl *Liberty and Nature*