

# Is Virtue Only a Means to Happiness?



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Editor: William R Thomas

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# Is Virtue Only A Means To Happiness?

An Analysis of Virtue and  
Happiness in Ayn Rand's  
Writings

*By Neera K. Badhwar*

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# Is Virtue Only A Means To Happiness? An Analysis of Virtue and Happiness in Ayn Rand's Writings

## I. Introduction

“The Objectivist ethics holds man’s life as the *standard* of value—and *his own life* as the ethical *purpose* of every individual man.”<sup>1</sup>

“To hold one’s own life as one’s ultimate value, and one’s own happiness as one’s highest purpose are two aspects of the same achievement.... Happiness can properly be the *purpose* of ethics, but *not* the standard.... It is only by accepting ‘man’s life’ as one’s primary and by pursuing the rational values it requires that one can achieve happiness—not by taking ‘happiness’ as some undefined, irreducible primary and then attempting to live by its guidance” (VOS 29/32).

“[T]he achievement of his own happiness is man’s highest moral purpose” (VOS 27/30). “Happiness is the successful state of life” and the emotional concomitant of such a life.<sup>2</sup>

“[T]he work of achieving one’s happiness” is “the purpose, the sanction and the meaning of life” (AS 674).

“Virtue is not an end in itself. Virtue is not its own reward.... *Life* is the reward of virtue—and happiness is the goal and reward of life”(AS 939).

Virtue, according to Ayn Rand, must be justified in terms of the requirements of life and happiness. I will not comment on Rand’s justification, except tangentially. Instead, I will focus on analyzing the logical relationship between virtue and happiness, understood as a successful state of life and its emotional concomitant. My central question will be: is virtue only a *means* to happiness, or also *constitutive* of it?

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*Objectivist Studies* 4 (Poughkeepsie, NY: The Objectivist Center, 2000): pp. 5–36.

If it is only a means, then happiness can be defined entirely independently of virtue. If it is partly constitutive of happiness, then happiness must be defined partly in terms of virtue. My main aim in this monograph is to answer this question about the relationship between virtue and happiness. Before I embark on this task, however, I need to briefly explain and justify why I call *happiness*, rather than *life*, or long-term *survival*, the ultimate value.

## II. The Ultimate Value: Survival or Happiness

What does Rand mean when she says that life is the ultimate value? Does she mean by “life” simply long-term survival, or does she mean “flourishing life”—happiness? Further, regardless of what Rand believes, which conception of the ultimate value is more plausible?

1. On the dominant interpretation of Rand’s views, “life” means long-term survival, and long-term survival (hereafter simply “survival”) is the ultimate value. On this “survivalist” interpretation, the value of happiness is dependent on the value of survival not only in the sense that the requirements of happiness incorporate the requirements of survival, but also in the sense that happiness is necessary for survival. Hence, happiness is a value only (or primarily) as a means to survival, which is the ultimate value.<sup>3</sup>

Many passages can be cited in support of the view that Rand sees long-term survival as the ultimate value. But, as Roderick Long’s detailed analyses of these passages show, most of them are ambiguous, and *can* be interpreted to mean happiness or well-being.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the strongest support for the survivalist interpretation comes from Rand’s teleological argument for an organism’s life as its ultimate value. All the physical functions of an organism, she says, are means to the final goal of its survival, which, therefore, is the organism’s ultimate value, and the standard of all its other values (VOS 16–17). The same, suitably modified, applies to human beings. Life is the source and standard of all our values, in the sense that all our genuine values—from food to philosophy to fine art—can be explained and justified in terms of their survival function. But unlike other organisms, we have to *choose* to live, to survive. The choice between survival and death is our most fundamental choice; and the choice of survival commits us to holding it as the ultimate value, and the requirements of human life as the standard of value.

Unfortunately, there are several problems with this argument. For one thing, the premise that all genuine human values can be explained or justified as promoting long-term survival (rather than simply being *compatible* with it) lacks empirical support. Genes, good food, a healthy environment, and the desire to live—or at least to avoid death—are all necessary for longevity, but there is no evidence that literature or philosophy are. Nor do people in fact become artists or philosophers—much less firefighters or rescue workers—for the sake of maximizing their survival (although they do, often, *risk* their survival to do their chosen work). By contrast, these values *can*,

plausibly, be explained and justified as serving happiness—i.e., a good life. For another thing, even granting the dubious proposition that people live on the basis of a choice of life over death (rather than simply because they find themselves in the midst of life and never think of leaving it), and the further proposition that morality must be founded on a fundamental choice, the choice of life over death is not the only choice that can serve as the foundation of morality. The choice of a happy life over, say, a secure or hedonistic or fame-filled life, can also provide a foundation. Hence, from the moral point of view, the choice of happiness can be the most fundamental choice.

Perhaps the most serious problem with the claim that survival is the ultimate goal, and all other values merely means to survival, is its implication that happiness is valuable only as a necessary means to survival. One problem with this view is that it directly contradicts many passages in Rand's writings, including the passages I have quoted at the head of this section. The other problem is that there is no reason to believe that it is true. First, although happiness makes life *more* worthwhile or valuable, it is not *essential* to life. People can, and many do, live long lives even under conditions of great unhappiness because they are afraid of death—or feel obligated to stay alive for the sake of their dependents, or are ashamed to admit defeat—or because they hope for happiness. So happiness cannot possibly be a necessary means to survival. Second, the claim that long-term survival is the ultimate value to which happiness is a mere means has no basis in what people actually value most highly. Longevity is certainly a value—but a long *happy* life is even more of a value—and a short intensely happy life more of a value for most people than a long miserable life. Fiction, poetry, philosophy, psychology, history, sociology, autobiography—and everyday experience—bear out these claims and contradict the survivalist view. If the survivalist view were true, then practically everyone would stand convicted of a massive misunderstanding of what is truly valuable—in their own lives, and in the lives of others, including those they love. Parents who wish their children long, *happy* lives would, at the very least, be guilty of redundancy in their wishes, as would religious people who pray for eternal *bliss*, and birthday cards that wish people many years of *happiness*. Finally, it is hard to understand what it could even mean to say that survival as such is more valuable than happiness. If it were, then a long more-or-less happy, or even unhappy, life—a life in which one's commitment to survival remained intact—would be just as desirable as a long superbly happy life. Nor would it make sense to say that an individual might be justified in finding his life not worth living *because* it is unhappy: after all, if he has life, he has everything of value. Indeed, it becomes a mystery why someone who had the highest value—life—would need a lesser value—happiness—to keep valuing the highest value. Or why, if he did, a long life should count as the highest value—rather than the heaviest burden....

By contrast, the view that happiness is the highest value encounters none of these problems.

2. On my reading of the texts, Rand uses “life” and “happiness” equivocally. Sometimes she uses them interchangeably to refer to the same state of affairs, namely,

a successful state of life. At other times, as when she states that life and happiness are two aspects of the same value, the existential and the psychological, respectively, Rand distinguishes between them conceptually while maintaining their inseparability. And at yet other times, she makes a conceptual distinction between them by using “life” to mean long-term survival (VOS 22–24/24–26), and “happiness” to mean simply positive feelings. The interesting point for my purposes is that regardless of how Rand uses these terms, she never says or implies that survival *rather than* happiness is one’s ultimate value. Instead, she is either indifferent between saying that happiness is one’s highest purpose and saying that life is one’s ultimate value, or she opts for saying that happiness is one’s highest purpose—“the purpose, the sanction and the meaning”—“the goal and reward”—of life itself (AS 674, 939).

Unlike the survivalist view of the highest value, the “happiness” view is easy to defend. Since a happy life is better—more desirable—than an unhappy or more-or-less happy life, it makes sense to say that a happy life, and not life *simpliciter*, is the ultimate value. Someone who has a happy life has everything of value; someone who has an unhappy life lacks a great value. It seems, then, that so long as happiness is understood as a successful and emotionally positive state of life, achievable only through the pursuit of rational values, and not simply as whatever happens to feel good to an individual—an “irreducible primary” (VOS 29)—there can be no objection to saying that happiness is the highest value.

It might be asked, however, what the “pursuit of rational values” amounts to if not “pursuit of values that promote life.” And if this is so, then (the argument might go), it is life, and not happiness, that is the ultimate value.

However, this argument is too quick. First, rational values can be understood as values the pursuit or achievement of which is inherently enjoyable and, under normal circumstances, *compatible* with, but not necessarily, even under normal circumstances, a *means* to, our survival. For example, we can, and many do, survive perfectly well without achieving—or even trying to achieve—meaningful careers or intimate friendships. But failure to pursue or achieve these values makes a dent in our happiness. Further, even if it were true that all rational values are survival-promoting, it would not follow that it is survival, rather than happiness, that is the ultimate value. For it could still be the case that survival itself is valuable only insofar as one has—or hopes to achieve—happiness.

In short, there are no good objections to the view that happiness is the ultimate value, and many to the view that survival is the ultimate value. The same considerations support the claim that it is the requirements of human happiness, rather than human survival, that constitute the standard and foundation of ethics. A vast literature exists to demonstrate that survival cannot serve as the foundation of any but a bare-boned Hobbesian morality—and the unusually powerful or talented or charming may not need even a Hobbesian morality to survive.<sup>5</sup> And Rand’s ethics is a far cry from such a morality: if Rand’s virtues were necessary for survival, the human species would surely have died out a long time ago. Instead the species has multiplied

beyond anyone's wildest predictions a hundred years ago—while its moral state has remained more-or-less steady.

None of this is surprising if, as I contend, Rand's virtues are necessary not for survival, but for happiness. For most people are both only more-or-less moral—and only more-or-less happy.<sup>6</sup> To the extent that people approach Rand's moral ideal, they do so because they strive for happiness, and implicitly or explicitly understand that human happiness is an ideal whose demands go far beyond the requirements of survival. Perhaps it is the force of such commonsense considerations that leads even Leonard Peikoff, contrary to his officially survivalist position, to state that “[l]ike the Greeks, Ayn Rand validates virtue by its effects on the actor's well-being” or happiness.<sup>7</sup>

### III. Virtue and Happiness: The Logical Relationship

What, then, is the relationship between happiness and virtue? Rand's statement that virtue is not an end in itself, not its own reward, but that life and happiness are the goal and reward, suggests that happiness is something entirely external to virtue, a further consequence of acting virtuously. Virtue, on this view, is only an instrumental means to value, including the supreme value, happiness. As Leonard Peikoff states, citing Rand's “Causality Versus Duty,” “[m]orality is no more than a means to an end; it defines the causes we must enact if we are to attain a certain effect” (OPAR 244).<sup>8</sup> And again, “[i]n the Objectivist approach, virtue is (by definition) the means to value” (OPAR 471, n. 25). Virtue is practical, he explains, in the sense that it “minimizes the risks inherent in life and maximizes the chance of success” (OPAR 328). Thus, virtue is a necessary means to happiness, but not in any way itself an aspect of happiness. The conceptual independence of happiness—and, more generally, values—from virtue is reiterated in several of Rand's statements.

Not, however, in all. Rand does not always treat happiness as conceptually independent of virtue and virtue as purely instrumental to happiness. As I will show, her novels and some of her theoretical statements present a different view, a view that, I believe, is far closer to the truth. Unfortunately, the purely instrumental analysis of virtue has become standard in current interpretations of Objectivist ethics, thanks, perhaps, to the persistence of two false assumptions. One assumption is that the sole alternative to regarding virtue as merely instrumental to happiness is to regard it as wholly an end in itself, i.e., as Rand puts it, as “its own reward”. Another is that to regard virtue as an end in itself is to regard it as quite unconnected to happiness. And this is to open the flood-gates to the irrationalism of intrinsicism or supernaturalism. Hence, the consequence of rejecting virtue as merely instrumental to happiness is to be unable to justify virtue in rational terms.

However, both assumptions are false. First, the alternative to regarding virtue as merely instrumental to a further end is not necessarily to regard it as wholly an end in itself. There is a third logical possibility, namely, to regard virtue as partly a means to happiness and partly an end in itself. Further, to regard virtue as an end in itself is not necessarily to regard it as unconnected to happiness. This is, indeed, how Kant

regarded it, but not, for example, Socrates or the Stoics. It can be an end in itself in the sense that it is (wholly or partly) *constitutive* of the supreme end, happiness. And if it is only partly constitutive of happiness, as I hold, then virtue and happiness remain distinct, though interrelated, concepts, and it is still possible to justify virtue in terms of its relationship to happiness.

If virtue is partly constitutive of happiness, then virtue *is*, to some extent, an end in itself—its own reward. I will argue that a philosophically and psychologically adequate analysis of virtue entails that virtue is partly constitutive of happiness, such that happiness is partly defined in terms of virtue. To deny this is to commit oneself to a distorted conception of both virtue and happiness. The conception of virtue and happiness that I will defend is also the one that best captures the vision of the ideal individual—the individual of virtue—and of the ideal life—the life of happiness—in Rand’s novels. And it is implied by at least some of her explicit statements about the relationship between virtue and happiness.<sup>9</sup> In the next section I will discuss Rand’s conception of virtue and its shortcomings, and go on to construct a fuller conception.

## IV. The Nature of Virtue

### 1. Rand’s Conception of Virtue

Rand defines virtue as the act by which we gain/and or keep value (AS 930, VOS 27). But she also defines particular virtues, such as justice, pride, integrity, honesty, et al., more fully in terms of the recognition of certain facts and of actions that accord with such recognition. Thus, 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—that every man must be judged for what he *is* and treated accordingly...” (AS 937, FNI 129). Similarly, integrity is “the recognition of the fact that you cannot fake your consciousness” (AS 936, FNI 129), a recognition that is expressed in loyalty to one’s rational values and convictions in the face of the contrary opinions of others (VOS 28, 52, 80). And honesty is “recognition of the fact that you cannot fake existence,” a recognition that is expressed in truthfulness in thought and speech (AS 936–37, FNI 129).

When Rand says, “you cannot fake the character of men”—or your consciousness or existence—she obviously does not mean that it is impossible to do so, since this would imply that injustice or lack of integrity or honesty are impossible. She means that you cannot do so in the long run without detriment to yourself, that to do so is disvaluable. Thus, recognition of the value of not faking various aspects of reality in thought or deed—or, in positive terms, of facing reality—is implicit in virtuous action. When we act virtuously, whatever other values we might aim to bring about, we give expression to—and, thereby, maintain—the value we place on facing reality. In this sense, every virtuous action both maintains a value, and is a means to

some value.<sup>10</sup> This is in keeping with Rand's general definition of virtue as the act by which we gain or keep value.

The values aimed at by justice, integrity, and honesty are connected to the values aimed at by the cardinal virtues of rationality, productiveness, and pride, namely, the three cardinal values of reason, purpose—or, as I will say, sense of purpose or purposiveness—and self-esteem. These values, says Rand, are “the means to and the realization of one's ultimate value, one's own life” (VOS 27). Although Rand does not say that they are the means to, and realization of, one's happiness, this follows from her claim that happiness and life are two aspects of the same value.

There is, thus, a hierarchy of values, as there is a hierarchy of virtues. But whatever the exact relationship of the non-cardinal values to the cardinal values, presumably the non-cardinal values have a necessary connection to the three cardinal values, and these to happiness, insofar as they are the means to, and the realization of, one's happiness. As far as I know, Rand does not explain what it means for these values to “realize” life or happiness, or how they do so. But when we talk of an action, state of affairs, or process realizing something (idea, desire, state of affairs, etc.), we mean that it actualizes, or embodies, or gives expression to, that thing. Thus, writing a poem realizes or actualizes the poetic idea. Again, a career that realizes one's aspirations is a career that embodies those aspirations. And self-realization is a process of giving expression to the self, of actualizing one's potential. Applying this to the cardinal values, then, we can say that insofar as we achieve reason, sense of purpose, and self-esteem, we also achieve or realize some part of happiness. In other words, these values are partly constitutive of happiness, in the sense that happiness cannot be identified entirely independently of these values.<sup>11</sup> They are also, of course, means to happiness. How exactly they are both means to, and partly constitutive of, happiness I will discuss in the last section of this paper.

Putting Rand's various statements about virtue together, we can say that, according to Rand, virtue consists of recognizing various values as both means to happiness, and partly constitutive of happiness, and of acting to gain and/or keep them.

Even this fuller definition, however, will not quite do. What is missing is the idea that a virtue is a character trait, an enduring disposition or orientation that is expressed in virtuous acts. There is a reference to character in the definition of the virtue of pride (AS 938, FNI 130), but here, too, character is that which pride aims to build; pride itself is not said to be a character trait. Yet Rand's novels amply illustrate that our moral responses reveal our characters—our moral selves, our souls—and that our characters consist not of particular cognitions of value and actions motivated by such cognition, but of general *dispositions* or *tendencies* to so cognize and act. It is character so construed that makes the characters in her novels the virtuous—or vicious—individuals they are.

But what sort of disposition is a virtuous character trait? Which faculties of mind does it involve? Rand's official position is that the recognition of values that is

part and parcel of virtue is entirely intellectual in nature—more generally, that cognition and reason are entirely an affair of the intellect. I will argue, however, that the rationality of virtuous dispositions and actions—the ability to track value—is a function of both intellect and emotions, and that virtuous traits are not only *intellectual* dispositions to apprehend and achieve value, they are also *emotional* dispositions. Hence, when I talk of the rationality of a virtuous disposition, I will have in mind the rationality of an *integrated intellectual and emotional disposition*. It is this sort of disposition that is possessed by Rand’s protagonists, whom she sees as exemplars of virtue, of moral excellence. In the next section, I will outline a conception of virtue that captures the character of Rand’s protagonists better than her own explicit statements about virtue, and that is more adequate to our everyday and scientific knowledge of human psychology.

## 2. A More Adequate Conception of Virtue

The notion of a moral virtue, as such, is the notion of a moral excellence, that than which nothing can be better. What, then, must be true of traits and actions if they are to count as morally excellent, the pinnacle of moral achievement? I will propose four features as immediately plausible conditions of moral excellence, plausible on the basis of reflective, lived experience, plausible by analogy with common ideas of excellence in other fields, and plausible because they fit Rand’s depiction of moral excellence in her novels. In the case of each feature, if we ask ourselves if its absence would not detract from the goodness of a trait or action, the answer will be obvious even without further argument.

(i) To count as excellent, a virtuous act must not only be motivated by a particular cognition and choice of the truly valuable, it must also express a standing *disposition* or habitual *tendency* to cognize and choose what is truly valuable. For a good act that expresses a disposition is more deeply rooted than a good act that is motivated only by a particular cognition—and the depth of a good thing is one measure of its goodness. Hence, to count as *excellent*, an act must express a virtuous *trait*. What, then, are the features of a virtuous or excellent trait?

(ii) One feature of a virtuous trait is that it must make us reliably responsive to the morally relevant features of the situations we face. Just as a reliable mountain guide is better than an unreliable one, so a trait that makes us reliably responsive to morally relevant features is better than a trait that doesn’t. But someone whose emotional dispositions are at variance with her intellectual dispositions will often fail to notice the morally relevant or important features of a situation. And so she will be a less reliable moral agent than someone whose emotions are integrated with her (justifiable) intellectual convictions. So, for example, someone who is committed to the principles of mutual respect and fairness, but who is prone to contemptuous anger towards those who disagree with her, will often fail to see that she is violating her own principles. Hence, she will lack the virtues—the excellences—of mutual respect and fairness.

This example shows how irrational emotions—emotions contrary to justifiable moral principles—can make us morally unreliable and why virtue requires that we not have such emotions. However, it does not show that virtue requires emotions that are in harmony with our justifiable moral principles. Between irrational emotions and rational emotions lies the possibility of flat emotions: perhaps we can avoid or get rid of irrational emotions by cultivating a Stoic affectlessness. To make good the claim that a virtue is, in part, an emotional disposition, I need to show that rational emotions are necessary for moral cognition and motivation.

The initial strangeness of the view that rational emotions are necessary for rational thought and action can be diminished by observing that it is simply the obverse of the view that irrational emotions can prevent or disrupt rational thought and action. Just as irrational emotions direct one's attention away from what is truly important, so rational emotions direct it towards what is truly important. Rational emotions thereby enable one to form an accurate picture of things, and fill the gap between the abstract guidance provided by moral principles and the ready ability to apply them to the situation at hand. Principles do not come with instructions for their own application. Knowing how to apply them calls for discernment and judgment about what is important in the situation, and these require the right emotional dispositions.

Consider, for example, the case of someone who has suffered a loss through his own carelessness. No principle or set of principles can tell us that in such situations the important feature is the loss and the right response sympathy—or, conversely, that the important feature is the carelessness, and the right response something other than sympathy. The morally important features of a situation depend on the context, and contexts vary indefinitely. Hence, the right response will also vary indefinitely. In this respect, moral principles are akin to medical principles, which also do not tell the doctor which symptoms are relevant or important, nor which treatment is the right treatment for every case of a certain disease. Nor is it possible for a moral theorist to devise principles that come complete with instructions for their application to every situation. For doing so would require the theorist—like the Social Planner of socialist economics—to be able to foresee every conceivable human context. And even if, per impossible, someone could do this, there would be a gap between the principles and their application. For we would still have to decide for ourselves which ones were relevant to the situation at hand or, to put it differently, which principles the situation instantiated. The ability to discern what is relevant or important in a given situation depends, in part, on experience and the stock of value-judgments that are embodied in our (rational) emotions.

Indeed, emotions seem to be necessary for making judgments of importance and relevance not only in morally complex situations, but even in simple everyday situations.<sup>12</sup> In *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*, the neurologist Antonio Damasio discusses patients with high IQs but impaired emotional faculties who are unable to make the simplest of decisions.<sup>13</sup> Elliot, for example, who

undergoes brain surgery for a tumor, emerges without any damage to his IQ, memory, or logical ability—but also without any feelings, not only about others, but also about himself, including his own tragedy. He also emerges unable to make important decisions or perform his tasks at work. Indeed, he is unable even to choose an appointment time with Damasio because he can give countless arguments for and against any time that Damasio proposes. According to Damasio, the problem with Elliot and others like him is that they have lost their “somatic markers,” the gut feelings we need to see which courses of action are good for us and which bad, and how to prioritize our concerns.

A vast amount of everyday experience supports the claim that emotions are indispensable for calling our attention to the more important features of our landscape, and helping us to prioritize our values and make decisions. Fear makes us aware of sounds and movements that portend danger on a dark city street. New mothers, once able to sleep through the sound of thunder, wake up at the slightest whimper from the baby, their senses sharpened by their concern for their child.

A vast amount of evidence also supports the more general and basic point that it is emotions that make us aware of the value-dimension of most things in the first place and, indeed, that our emotions are partly constitutive of many of our values. People with an impaired or stunted emotional faculty are unable to grasp what matters in human affairs, or share many of the same values as emotionally normal people. The most dramatic and famous case, the one that started Damasio on his research, is that of Phineas Gage, who lost all feeling—and all moral agency—after an iron bar bored into his brain in a drilling accident, damaging his frontal lobe.<sup>14</sup> Then there are people, variously called psychopaths or sociopaths by psychologists, who appear incapable of making moral distinctions—or acting in their own self-interest. In *The Mask of Sanity*, Hervey Cleckley argues that the psychopath’s failure to develop moral agency is due to his stunted emotional capacity, a deficiency that renders him incapable of seeing the significance of things.<sup>15</sup> The psychopath is rational in a purely abstract sense: he can perform complex calculations and deductions, and can even follow arguments for doing or not doing certain things. But he simply cannot be motivated by his abstract intellectual understanding of what he needs to do to achieve certain ends—even when they concern his own long-term welfare—because these ends *mean* nothing to him, have no *importance* to him. In standard philosophical terminology, he has *theoretical* rationality, but no *practical* rationality.

The constitutive role of emotion in value is often effectively dramatized in fiction and film. Thus, Star Trek’s Spock, who is almost all intellect, can neither share certain human values—in particular, romantic love or intimate friendship—nor fully appreciate their importance to human life. If half the human species lost their emotional faculties and became beings of pure intellect, they would also lose most of their values and become unable to fully appreciate many of the values of the other half of the species. To paraphrase Daniel Goleman, without emotions the intellect is blind (EI 53).

The importance of emotions for having the full range of human values, and the importance of the right emotions for apprehending the relevant and important values in particular situations, shows why a reliable moral agent must have emotions that are in harmony with her justified principles. Thus, the ability to act for the good, for what is truly valuable, in a wide variety of situations, including novel situations, requires an integration of one's emotional and intellectual dispositions. A virtue, then, must be an integrated emotional and intellectual disposition.

This conception of a virtuous disposition, though absent from Rand's theoretical writings, is amply illustrated in her fiction. The following scene from *Atlas Shrugged* shows how the right emotional orientation can enhance a person's awareness and guide her responses.

Dagny, the heroine of the novel, has been looking for a scientist who can understand the design and structure of the motor she has discovered in a scrap pile, the motor she later learns was invented by Galt. On failing to find anyone intelligent enough or interested enough in her discovery, she reluctantly calls upon the brilliant Dr. Stadler. Reluctantly, because, despite his dedication to principles of rationality and truth in science, he fails to apply them to human affairs. As he has told Dagny on an earlier occasion, "[m]en are not open to truth or reason," and must be deceived or forced if the men of intellect are to accomplish anything (AS 180). And so he endorses the establishment of a state-funded Institute of Science, and allows himself to become a lackey of politicians in the name of saving science. When Hank Rearden's metal is unjustly attacked in his name, he refuses to dissociate himself from the attack. This is the background of Dagny's decision to meet with Dr. Stadler in the hope of uncovering the secret of the motor—and its inventor.

When Stadler reads about the motor in the materials that Dagny shows him, he openly expresses his astonishment and delight at the extraordinary achievement. Dagny wishes that "she could smile in answer and grant him the comradeship of a joy celebrated together," but finds herself unable to do any more than nod and say a cold "Yes" (AS 332). Her response here is true to the full context of her knowledge of Stadler, a context made immediately available to her only with the help of her emotions. Throughout the discussion her responses are guided by her knowledge of Stadler's past, even as they are finely calibrated to variations in Stadler's present behavior. Thus, when he exclaims, "It's so wonderful to see a great, new, crucial idea which is not mine," and asks her if she has ever felt a "longing" for someone she "could admire," she softens and tells him that she's felt it all her life (AS 335).

Not only do rational emotions guide moral perception and response, they even sometimes *correct* a person's intellectual judgments. Thus, when Dagny is on her way to confront Francisco who, apparently, has turned into a playboy, destroying people and fortunes, she is determined to grant him no personal response, for she is certain that he deserves none. Yet when he smiles at her, "the unchanged, insolent, brilliant smile of his childhood," and greets her with their childhood greeting, she finds herself greeting him likewise, "irresistibly, helplessly, happily" (AS 114). Her

emotions pick up something that her intellect alone could not, and lead her to respond appropriately to the facts, though contrary to her intentions.

These and similar passages illustrate some of the ways in which Rand's portrayal of virtue in her novels goes beyond, and corrects, her theoretical statements about it.

To summarize the discussion thus far: to count as a moral excellence, a fully virtuous act must be deeply rooted in us, i.e., in a virtuous character trait, and such a trait must be an integrated intellectual-emotional disposition that enables us to recognize, and respond appropriately to, the relevant features of a particular situation. What else must be the case for virtuous acts and traits to count as virtuous—as the pinnacle of moral achievement?

(iii) A virtuous act is an act that is done not only for the right reasons—i.e., for the right end, and in response to the relevant features of the situation—but also in the right manner. For example, helping someone in need when we judge that we should falls short of true kindness if we do it with an air of performing a painful duty. Nor is it necessarily better than not helping at all. Again, conceding a point in an argument when we recognize that it is only fair to do so does not count for much if we concede it in a resentful manner (“O.k., o.k., you win!”). This, too, is not necessarily better than not conceding it at all. This is the sort of manner we can see James Taggart adopting, but not, for example, Hank Rearden or Dagny. Indeed, had Rand ever shown Rearden or Dagny doing anything like this, she would have destroyed the integrity, the coherence, of her portrayals of her characters. Once again, the idea that a virtuous act must be done in the right manner is implicit in her novels, although never explicitly recognized by her.

These examples serve as simple but powerful thought experiments to show how the wrong manner can undermine the very rightness of an act done for the right reasons. But what is the explanation for the importance of a right manner? It is surely not that a wrong manner will turn people off, although this is true. Nor is it that it is misleading: in the examples given, it is obvious that the individuals in question intend to help or accept their mistakes. The explanation, once again, lies in the importance of the emotions. The resentful or pained manner shows that “the heart is not in the right place,” that the act is not done in “the right spirit.” Acting in the right spirit—from the right emotional state—is important because the emotions are part of our moral selves. And if a morally excellent act must express all of the moral self, then, once again, the disposition it expresses must be an integrated intellectual-emotional disposition.

Virtuous acts and traits, then, express not only the agent's *commitment* to the right, but her wholehearted *love* of the right. This wholeheartedness is exemplified in Dagny's character, whose “love of rectitude,” we are told, was “the only love to which all the years of her life had been given” (AS 512). When the “moratorium on brains” is announced, this love expresses itself in a total, cold anger—and a calm, full, intellectual certainty that she must immediately resign from the Vice-Presidency of Taggart

Transcontinental (*ibid*). Only a wholehearted love of the good—a love in which all of the agent’s self is involved—can express virtue, because a wholehearted love of the good is better than a half-hearted or divided love. And this not only because it is more reliable, but also because it is more expressive of the worth of its object: the good is eminently worth loving.

(iv) Lastly, if the point of morality is to enable us to achieve the supreme value, happiness, then a virtuous or excellent character must put us in the best state for achieving it. To do this it must (a) enable us to stay in touch with reality,<sup>16</sup> and (b) integrate and harmonize our inner life. The first, because the more “gappy” our grasp of reality, the more precarious our happiness; the second, because inner conflict is both inherently unpleasant and an obstacle to this grasp. This connection of virtue with happiness is one more reason why virtue must be seen as an integrated intellectual-emotional disposition. For, as we have already seen, both inner harmony and a stable connection with reality require an integration of our emotions with our reason.

To summarize: a virtuous character trait is a disposition to think, feel, desire, and respond fittingly, with fine discrimination, in a variety of situations. This is explicitly recognized by Aristotle, whose definition captures what Rand depicts in her fiction far better than her own definition. In the next section I will fill out the conception of virtue I have outlined so far by discussing the main components of Aristotle’s conception, and illustrating it with scenes from Rand’s novels.

### 3. Aristotle’s Conception of Virtue and Rand’s Virtuous Individuals

Aristotle defines virtue as “a character state concerned with choice, lying in a mean relative to us, this being determined by practical wisdom, that is, as the man of practical wisdom would determine it.”<sup>17</sup>

This definition follows his explanation in earlier chapters of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that a character state is a state in relation to feelings and actions (NE II.3.1104b13–15, 28–30, II.6.1106.16–29), and that a virtuous character is acquired through repeated acts expressing “correct reason” and avoiding excess and deficiency (NE II.2). In later chapters Aristotle also argues that virtuous dispositions—the dispositions that embody the right emotional and action tendencies, and issue in the right responses—require the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom (NE VI.13.1144b31–32). Thus, full-fledged moral virtue is an integrated intellectual-emotional disposition to choose the “mean” or “intermediate” or appropriate response in a wide variety of situations. By contrast, vice is a disposition to choose the “extreme” or inappropriate response. So, for example, the virtue of generosity is the mean opposed to the vices of prodigality and stinginess, and courage is the mean opposed to the vices of recklessness and cowardice. The mean is “relative to us,” says Aristotle, in the sense that the right or appropriate action depends not only on the external circumstances of action, but also on our nature as human beings and on certain features of the individual agent. Thus, bestowing material benefits on others counts as generosity only if it is consistent with one’s own needs and resources. For example, a \$50 contri-

bution to the cause of freedom might be generous for a graduate student, prodigal for an undergraduate student, and downright stingy for a millionaire who professes dedication to the cause of freedom above all else.

As these examples suggest, and as Aristotle explains in Bk. VI, the mean or virtuous act in a given situation is determined with the help of one's intellect, this being necessary for taking into account all the relevant facts—relevant, i.e., to the overarching consideration of one's own happiness. Particular goods—values—must be regulated and ordered with a view to the agent's highest value, his own happiness. Practical wisdom is the virtue—the excellence—of the practical intellect, defined as “a state grasping the truth .... concerned with action about what is good or bad for a human being” (NE VI.5.1140b4–5). But practical wisdom itself is possible only with the proper emotional dispositions that are part and parcel of virtue. As Aristotle puts it, “[p]ractical wisdom, this eye of the soul [*psuche*, mind], cannot reach its fully developed state without virtue.... For the highest good [happiness] is apparent only to the good person.... Vice perverts us and produces false views about the origins [goals] of actions” (NE VI.12.1144a30–35). The emotional dispositions of the vicious lead them to desire the wrong things, or desire things like honor and wealth out of proportion to their true worth, and produce a false conception of happiness. By contrast, a wise and virtuous choice expresses “truth agreeing with correct desire” (NE VI.2.1139a.30) or correct desire combined with correct thought (NE VI.2.1139b5).

The inner states and actions of the virtuous or wise man—the exemplar of moral virtue—display not merely an intellectual commitment to principle, but an intellectual and emotional disposition that informs his characteristic ways of deliberating, perceiving, feeling, and desiring, so that he acts “at the right [appropriate] times, about the right things, towards the right people, for the right end, and in the right way” (NE II.6.1106b21–23). Such a person has the ready ability to “hit the nail on the head”—to respond exactly appropriately—in a wide variety of difficult situations. Because he has a true conception of happiness, and an unerring sense of the mean, his image—like that of Rand's protagonists—can help us decide how to act in difficult situations.

Aristotle makes an instructive distinction between the virtuous man and the merely strong-willed or continent (*enkratic*) man. Both have the right principles and commitments, and dispositionally act in accordance with their right judgment. Nevertheless, the strong-willed man falls short of practical wisdom and virtue because his emotions conflict with his intellectual judgment. He is rational without possessing that excellence of practical reason which is practical wisdom, and he is rightly motivated without possessing that excellence of desire and feeling which is virtue of character. Hence, he also lacks the fine-tuned perceptiveness and responsiveness that is characteristic of the virtuous.

Rand does not discuss or depict the merely strong-willed man, but her portrayals of her ideal characters illustrate the Aristotelian conception of a virtuous character. When her ideal characters act honestly or fairly or kindly, they do so whole-

heartedly: they *desire* to do what they correctly *evaluate* as good and *believe correctly* they ought to do. And so their responses “hit the mean” in a wide variety of situations.

A good example of this occurs in a scene in *The Fountainhead*, where Peter Keating goes to see Howard Roark to bribe him for remaining silent about his contribution to the Cosmo-Slotnick building, the building for which Keating has won an award. In the conversation that precedes the actual offering of the bribe, Keating tries to persuade Roark to compromise his principles and aim for success. “Just drop that fool delusion that you’re better than everybody else—and go to work.... Just think, Howard, think of it! You’ll be rich, you’ll be famous, you’ll be respected, you’ll be praised, you’ll be admired—you’ll be one of us!”<sup>18</sup> Roark looks at him, with eyes that are “attentive and wondering,” knowing that Peter is sincere, but also that he is disturbed by something in him, Roark, and asks, “Peter, what is it that disturbs you about me as I am?” (FH 192). Keating responds honestly, acknowledging that he *is* disturbed by something in Roark, although he doesn’t know what. In the face of this confession, Roark’s response “hits the mean” by being exactly appropriate to the situation. “Pull yourself together, Peter,” said Roark gently, as to a comrade. “We’ll never speak of that again.”

To the extent that Keating is honest, he is Roark’s equal, to be treated with respect, not scorn. And because he is honest and willing to show that he is ashamed of himself, he deserves the kindness of being given the chance to “pull himself together,” to recover his dignity. In the next moment, however, Keating’s attitude changes. He pretends that he was “only talking good plain horse sense,” thereby implicitly denying his fear of Roark. Roark’s attitude changes immediately: he responds to this dishonesty harshly, telling Peter to shut up. Once again, Roark’s response “hits the mean,” giving Peter exactly the treatment he deserves.

In this scene, as in many others, we see an individual whose responses are appropriate to the situation in all the ways delineated by Aristotle: in aim, in timing, in the emotions felt, and in manner. Such “fine-tuning” of his responses is possible only because they are informed by both his intellect and his emotions. The virtues integrate the virtuous person’s moral self, his cognitive, emotional, and motivational powers, and make him wholehearted in his devotion to the good: a lover of the good, rather than, like the *enclatic* man, its willing conscript.

The fact that the virtues make us lovers of the good has an immediate non-instrumental payoff. Since we all get pleasure from doing what we love—the philosopher from philosophizing, the gourmet from gourmandizing, the builder from building—the person who loves virtue gets pleasure from acting virtuously. This is not to suggest that the pleasure of acting virtuously is a pleasure in yet another kind of activity of the same order as philosophizing or building; rather, it is a pleasure in doing these very activities virtuously. The pleasure of acting virtuously is a pleasure that comes from doing these things in a way that amounts, as Aristotle would say, to doing them finely, i.e., for the right reasons, from the right motivations, in the right

manner, at the right time, and so on. Thus, both the philosopher who tends—or is tempted—to take shortcuts to boost his publication record, and the philosopher for whom this is unthinkable, can enjoy the process of solving problems as long as the going is easy. But only the philosopher with the virtues of honesty and integrity can enjoy the fact that she faced problems honestly and remained true to her commitment to pursue philosophic truth, even when doing so involved the pain of renouncing long-cherished beliefs. No doubt the philosopher who sometimes takes shortcuts can take pleasure in making a name for himself if his shortcuts go undetected or are simply seen as innocent mistakes in an otherwise good record of work. He may even, like a con artist, take pleasure in getting away with fooling others with clever but fallacious arguments. But both Rand and Aristotle would argue that his pleasures are undercut by fears and conflicts within himself. In Rand, these fears and conflicts come from evasion or self-deception, which she sees as being at the root of all immorality, as Sartre saw *mauvaise foi* as being at the root of all inauthenticity.<sup>19</sup> And like Sartre again, Rand believes that no evasion is completely successful: the truth constantly threatens to resurface, setting up a conflicted dynamic of seeing and not-seeing, and leading to an ever more tangled web of evasions and fear of the threatening truths. In Aristotle, the conflicts of the dishonest or cowardly or otherwise base come from a self divided between the desire to do the right thing and the desire to do the wrong, so that whatever they do, they are filled with regret (NE IX.4.1166b).<sup>20</sup> For both Rand and Aristotle, only the virtuous enjoy the pleasures of a mind in harmony with reality and at peace with itself. For only the virtuous steadfastly order their lives with a view to their supreme value, their own happiness. Thus, the pleasure they take in their activities is the distinctive pleasure of acting with an undivided mind, confident in the belief that whatever the costs of doing so, they act for the sake of their own highest good.

The claim that virtuous activity is inherently pleasurable is compatible with the fact that a virtuous act can involve pain. When a serious loss of, or damage to, other goods is involved, Aristotle recognizes that the right action will involve pain. But the pain will be due to the loss of real, important goods, not to the loss of trifles or of things that should never have been valued in the first place. Nor, of course, will the pain come from the knowledge that one is doing the right thing—only the very vicious would find *this* painful.

Rand also depicts the pleasure, or at least the sense of inner satisfaction and fulfillment, that a virtuous person gets from doing the right thing—without forgetting the painful, even tragic, aspects that the choice of the right action can involve. In *Atlas Shrugged*, Francisco's choice to give up Dagny and his work, the things he loves most, perhaps forever, for the sake of joining the strike, is a particularly dramatic example of the agonizing loss that the choice to do the right thing can involve. It is also an example of the serenity and fulfillment attendant on such a choice. On his last night with Dagny, at the height of his despair, Francisco turns to her and begs her to help him refuse Galt's call, "[e]ven though he's right" (AS 111). By the next morning,

however, after he has emerged from his agonized struggle and made his decision, his face shows “both serenity and suffering,” and he looks like a man “who sees that which makes the torture worth bearing” (AS 112).

The veridicality of Rand’s portrayal of her ideal characters lends support to Aristotle’s conception of virtue, just as the independent plausibility of Aristotle’s conception of virtue provides a theoretical justification for Rand’s portrayals.

Aristotle’s conception of vice—the worst possible state of character—is also illustrated in Rand’s fiction. According to Aristotle, vice disposes an individual to feel, deliberate, choose, and act wrongly. Vice blinds a person to the good, and may even reverse his perception of good and bad, so that he sees the good as bad and the bad as good (NE III.4). Vice, says Aristotle memorably, is unconscious of itself (NE VII.8.1150b35). This conception of vice captures Rand’s portrayal of her wholly or partly vicious characters.

In *The Fountainhead*, Gail Wynand is time and again shown revealing his lust for power without any awareness that what he is revealing is a vice—even if, as he claims, those he wants to break are devoid of integrity.

Power, Dominique. The only thing I ever wanted. To know that there’s not a man living whom I can’t force to do—anything. Anything I choose.... They say I have no sense of honor, I’ve missed something in life. Well, I haven’t missed very much, have I? The thing I’ve missed—it doesn’t exist (FH 497).

Rather like a latter-day Thrasymachus, the anti-moralist in Plato’s *Republic* who sees a person’s ability to get away with injustice as a sign of superior strength, Wynand sees his ability to break people’s wills as a sign of his superior self-sufficiency. And again rather like Thrasymachus, who “unmasks” justice as simply a ploy of the strong to get the weak to serve their interests, Wynand “unmasks” people’s belief in integrity as simply a sign of their false consciousness, interpreting his own cynicism as a sign of his clear-sightedness and honesty (FH 497).

However, the vicious are not *always* unconscious—ignorant—of their vice. Sometimes they are aware of it but suppress their awareness, as they suppress their awareness of many other facts. Sometimes, again, habitual evasiveness combines with ignorance to put a person at the mercy of his vicious dispositions, which then “break through” and subvert his better intentions, even to his own detriment. Consider again the scene where Keating goes to see Roark to bribe him for remaining silent about his contribution to the Cosmo-Slotnick building. He has “planned the interview to be smooth and friendly,” with a manner to match. But he surprises himself by starting off with the words, “What’s the matter, Howard? You look like hell. Surely, you’re not overworking yourself, from what I hear?” (FH 191). His manner is insultingly familiar and condescending, prompted by his desire to show Roark that he is not afraid of him, a fear that he himself does not understand. His desire to “prove” that he is not afraid of

Roark takes control of him, overcoming the intention to conduct the interview smoothly. In Rand's words, "[h]e felt himself rolling down a hill, without brakes. He could not stop." Matters escalate, as the passage quoted earlier shows, and Keating ends up not only failing to conceal his fear of Roark, but confessing it to boot.

#### 4. Emotions and Cognition

The Aristotelian conception of virtue and vice gives emotion a central role in their constitution. The emotions that partly constitute the virtues not only motivate right action, they also have cognitive power, for they track what is truly valuable. Thus, says Aristotle, the courageous person's confidence and fearlessness aid him in seeing which dangers are worth facing for which ends (NE III.6–7). By contrast, the emotions that partly constitute the vices track what is disvaluable, a spurious image of the good. Thus, the cowardly person's fearfulness and lack of confidence exaggerate the danger, becoming tools of distortion that make safety at any cost the most important good (NE III.7.1115b34ff).

Clearly, even though emotions do not enter into her definition of virtue, Rand the novelist, like Aristotle the philosopher, sees the agent's emotional dispositions as a crucial component of his moral character, and as having the power to enhance or distort cognition (see NE II, 2 and 3 above). "Emotions," she states, "are estimates of that which furthers man's values or threatens them, that which is *for* him or *against* him—lightning calculators giving him the sum of his profit or loss" (VOS 27). The emotions of someone who wholeheartedly values the truly valuable—truth, reason et al.—will apprise her of what is truly good or bad in particular situations. Since emotions, unlike deliberate, conscious reasoning, are "lightning" quick, without them she would often act too late or fail to act at all. Since rational emotions, unlike deliberate, conscious reasoning, make available a vast store of evaluative knowledge, it follows that Rand would agree that in the absence of such emotions a person would simply fail to see certain things. Without rational emotions, then, a person would make mistakes of judgment and act inappropriately or not at all. It is this "emotional intelligence," to use Goleman's term, that enables Dagny to recognize, "[i]n a single shock of emotion," that Ellis Wyatt's simple greeting signifies "forgiveness, understanding, acknowledgment" (AS 157). And it is because Dagny knows that her emotions have cognitive power that she can surrender "her consciousness to a single sight and a single, wordless emotion...[Aware] that what she now felt was the instantaneous total of the thoughts she did not have to name, the final sum of a long progression, like a voice telling her by means of a feeling" (AS 674).

In her fiction, Rand also depicts the power of emotions to affect cognition in ways that are independent of the issue of virtue or vice. Moods and feelings induced by events in one's life, events to which they may be appropriate responses, can affect, for good or for bad, the way one sees other things. In a couple of striking scenes in *Atlas Shrugged*, we see Hank Rearden first overcome by disgust at the world around him, a disgust that makes "the city seem sodden to him" (AS 349), and then, on

reaching Dagny's apartment, recover his sense of benevolence, a sense that enables him to see the city as a stupendous achievement of human creativity (AS 351). In fact, the city is both sodden in some respects and a great achievement, but Rearden's disgust at the world hides its greatness till he has recovered the proper emotional state, a sense of benevolence.<sup>21</sup>

As this discussion shows, some of Rand's stated views of the emotions, along with her depiction of them in her fiction, imply the view, so central to Aristotle's conception of virtue, that emotions have cognitive power. However, Rand also holds that "emotions are not tools of cognition" (VOS 29), by which she means that *in themselves* they are cognitively inert. Emotions must be "programmed" by the intellect. As she states, "[m]an's emotional mechanism is like an electronic computer, which his mind has to program—and the programming consists of the values his mind chooses" (VOS 28).

The idea that the emotions have to be programmed by the intellect is surely true of most adult emotions, since evaluative beliefs are implicit in the various emotions. However, the view that the intellect chooses values (presumably) independently of any help from the emotions implies an implausible unidirectional picture of moral psychology. On this picture, the intellect, functioning independently of the emotional faculty, first collects the data and makes value-judgments; then it programs the emotional faculty. The preprogrammed emotional faculty is inert, unable to make any value responses, and unable to play a fundamental role in forming or aiding the intellect.

However, if infants and young children (not to mention animals) have emotions in a pre-conceptual form—as they surely do—then emotions cannot be entirely dependent on the intellect. Like the higher animals, we feel fear, anger, contentment, empathy, and pleasure in a pre-conceptual form long before we acquire the capacity to make value-judgements. Insofar as these are responses to what we sense as somehow good or bad for us, valuable or disvaluable, it follows that we are able to make value *responses* long before we are able to make value-*judgements*. Indeed, it is only because we have this pre-conceptual ability for responding to value that we can acquire the capacity for making value-judgments.<sup>22</sup> Thus, pre-conceptual emotions are necessary for having any more than the most primitive values in the first place, and, thereby, for making value-judgments. Adult emotions build on these pre-conceptual emotions and the value-judgments they make possible. For example, adult fear typically<sup>23</sup> contains not only the components of feeling and physiological response that a child's fear does, but also the value-judgment of the feared object as dangerous or threatening. *Which* objects are seen as fearful depends not on the judgments of an untouched intellect, but an intellect already shaped to some extent by our pre-conceptual emotions, and continually influenced by, even as it in turn influences, our adult emotions.<sup>24</sup>

Aristotle's picture of a developmental process in which intellect and emotion grow and mature interdependently, each influencing the other, and a mature

psychology in which they continue to influence each other, reflects these facts. It is, therefore, a more adequate picture of the relationship between intellect and emotion than Rand's hierarchical account of the emotions as programmed by an untouched intellect.

Rand's writings also often suggest that in a conflict between one's emotions and one's intellectual judgement, one must always opt for the latter, that the intellect is always more trustworthy than the emotions. But this flies in the face of the fact that beliefs can be mistaken and reasoning off-track just as easily as emotions. And one reason why one's emotional response in a situation may be more trustworthy than one's intellectual judgment is that, as Rand herself points out, emotions can apprise us of a vast amount of evaluative information. Given this, whether one should opt for the deliverances of one's emotions in a particular situation, or for one's intellectual judgement, depends on the general reliability of one's emotions vis-a-vis one's intellect in that sort of situation. This would be true even if, contrary to my argument, Rand's picture of a hierarchical relationship between intellect and emotion in moral development were correct. For the past judgments that are now partly constitutive of the emotions may be more accurate than the present judgment that they contradict. Knowing when to rely on one's emotions, and when to discount them, is the better part of self-knowledge—and wisdom.

Once again, though, Rand's fiction contains counterexamples to her view that the intellect is always more trustworthy than the emotions. We have already seen an example in the scene where Dagny finds herself responding to Francisco happily, instead of with the intended coldness. Still others occur in *The Fountainhead*, particularly in the scenes involving Dominique or Roark with Gail Wynand. Indeed, some of the psychological nuances and complexities of Dominique's and Roark's relationship with Wynand can be understood only as the result of each of them allowing their emotional responses to challenge their intellectual judgments. Consider the passage in which Dominique urges Wynand—the man who stands for everything she despises—to fire Ellsworth Toohey, because he is a threat to Wynand's beloved *Banner*—the paper that caters to everything she despises.

Gail, when I married you, I didn't know I'd come to feel this kind of loyalty to you. It contradicts everything I've done, it contradicts so much more than I can tell you—it's a sort of catastrophe for me, a turning point—don't ask me why—it will take me years to understand—I know only that this is what I owe you (FH 499–500).

Dominique allows her feeling of loyalty to Wynand to dictate her action, even though she cannot quite understand why she feels this loyalty to him; she “knows” she “owes” him this warning, even though she cannot quite understand why she should want his paper saved. The fact that Wynand is an “innocent weapon” compared to Toohey, who is “a corrosive gas....the kind that eats lungs out,” neither

justifies Dominique's feeling of loyalty, nor supports her claim to "know" that she "owes" Wynand a warning (FH 500). After all, even if Wynand is innocent compared to Toohey, his record of destruction can still only be classified as unambiguously evil. We can understand Dominique's actions and words only if we interpret her as trusting her emotions to tell her something her intellect alone cannot yet grasp.<sup>25</sup>

To reiterate: Rand's depiction of virtuous dispositions and acts in her novels, in particular, of the role played in them by our emotions, is closer to Aristotle's views of these matters than her own stated views. With this in mind, we can now finally turn to her conception of happiness, and the central issue of this paper: the relationship of happiness to virtue.

## V. Happiness

### 1. Rand's Definition(s) of Happiness

(i) "Happiness is that state of consciousness which proceeds from the achievement of one's values" (VOS 28).

The values in question are rational values. "If you achieve that which is the good by a rational standard of value, it will necessarily make you happy; but that which makes you happy, by some undefined emotional standard, is not necessarily the good" (VOS 29). The implication of the second clause, that it is possible to be happy even if one's values are irrational, is later taken back, so I will not comment on it. It is worth mentioning only as a reminder that Rand sometimes uses the word "happiness" to mean a purely subjective mental state.

(ii) "Happiness is 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 own destruction.... Happiness is possible only to a rational man, the man who desires nothing but rational goals, seeks nothing but rational values and finds his joy in nothing but rational actions" (VOS 29/32).

"The maintenance of life and the pursuit of happiness are not two separate issues....[but] two aspects of the same achievement. Existentially, the activity of pursuing rational goals is the activity of maintaining one's life; psychologically, its result, reward and concomitant is an emotional state of happiness" (VOS 29/32).

These definitions make two important points.

(1) Happiness is a positive, harmonious (non-contradictory) state of consciousness.

(2) It is a state of consciousness that results from the achievement of one's rational values, and only from such values.

Rand also gives a definition of happiness in VOS in which happiness is more than a state of consciousness.

(iii) "Happiness is the successful state of life" (VOS 27/30).

Here happiness is identified with the state of life in which one has achieved one's rational values through rational—and, therefore, virtuous—means. Putting these

thoughts together, we can say that, for Rand, happiness is a successful state of life achieved through virtuous action, and the positive state of consciousness that accompanies and results from such a life.

When Rand says that a happy life is the life in which one has achieved one's rational values, she often has in mind existential or external values or life-goals, most importantly, career and romantic love. On this conception of happiness—the conception standardly accepted in interpretations of her views—virtue is only a means to happiness. Yet many of her claims—as also her portrayal of her characters—imply a different view, the view that a life in which we fail to achieve our most important external values, but still continue to act honestly, justly, and with integrity, is also to some extent a successful and, therefore, happy life. In other words, many of her claims imply the Aristotelian view that a virtuous life is partly *constitutive* of a happy life. The most important texts supporting this view are the ones that deal with Rand's conception of the cardinal values and their connection to happiness.

As we have already seen, the cardinal values, the values that are achieved or maintained and expressed by the cardinal virtues, are the largely psychological higher-order values of reason, purposiveness, and self-esteem. As she makes clear, to truly value reason is to have a commitment to living rationally, and to derive pleasure from living rationally. Someone who claims to value reason but fails to live rationally, or succeeds but finds it burdensome to do so, has not yet fully internalized the value of reason. By the same token, he has not yet fully acquired the virtue of rationality. For a virtue, it is worth recalling, is not merely a pattern of commitment and action, but a deep-seated disposition to think, feel, and act in a certain way, a disposition one has internalized and takes pleasure in expressing in action. Likewise, to truly value having a purpose is to have a commitment to living a life of productive activity, and to take pleasure in such a life. Someone who fails to live productively in the absence of any external hindrances, or who finds it burdensome to live productively, has not yet fully internalized the value of being purposive. But by the same token, he has not yet fully acquired the virtue of productivity. The cardinal virtues of rationality and of productiveness, then, are exercised in rational and productive activity that is motivated in this wholehearted way by the value of reason and purposiveness. And it is in a life characterized by the virtues of rationality and productivity, and only in such a life, that one maintains and expresses love of reason and purposiveness.

The third cardinal value, a sense of self-esteem, is the sense of oneself as being *able* to achieve happiness and being *worthy* of happiness (AS 936, FNI 128). Hence, someone who truly values self-esteem will continually strive to become—and remain—the sort of person who is both capable of happiness and worthy of happiness. The (justified) sense of being worthy of happiness requires that one *be* worthy of happiness, and this requires, says Rand, the virtue of pride or *moral ambitiousness*, the virtue aimed at achieving or maintaining one's own moral perfection (VOS 27).<sup>26</sup> Only by acting to perfect ourselves can we achieve and maintain self-esteem, and only by valuing self-esteem can we be motivated to act with pride. It is in a life

characterized by the virtue of pride, then, and only in such a life, that one can maintain self-esteem and express the value one places on self-esteem.<sup>27</sup>

It follows that, so long as one can act virtuously, one is guaranteed success at achieving or maintaining the three supreme values—reason, purposefulness, and self-esteem—regardless of success or failure in achieving one’s external values. So, if happiness is a successful state of life, then such “inner” success must count not only as a necessary *means* to happiness, but as itself a major *part* of happiness. I will refer to the life of merely inner success as a life of partial or “inner” happiness, and the life of both inner and outer success as full happiness. Images of both partial and full happiness occur in several passages in Rand’s novels.

## 2. Images of Happiness in Rand’s Novels

### (i) Partial happiness

- ◆ *Anthem*: The Transgressor of the Unspeakable Word.

“They had torn out the tongue of the Transgressor, so that they could speak no longer. The Transgressor were young and tall. They had hair of gold and eyes of blue as morning. They walked to the pyre, and their step did not falter. And of all the faces on that square, of all the faces which shrieked and screamed and spat curses upon them, theirs was the calmest and the happiest face....There was no pain in their eyes and no knowledge of the agony of their body. There was only joy in them, and pride, a pride holier than it is fit for human pride to be.”<sup>28</sup>

- ◆ *The Fountainhead*: Roark in the quarry. Roark’s months in the quarry are shot through with pain—pain at the loss of the opportunity to be doing the thing he loves. Yet he is not unhappy. His consciousness of having done the right thing in refusing to build buildings that violate his architectural principles, and his sense of purpose in being engaged in a “clean,” worthwhile activity in the quarry, give him a sense of serenity and quiet satisfaction that are part of happiness.

He liked the work. He felt at times as if it were a match of wrestling between his muscles and the granite. He was very tired at night. He liked the emptiness of his body’s exhaustion. (201).

The earth of the woods he crossed was soft and warm under his feet; it was strange, after a day spent on the granite ridges; he smiled as at a new pleasure, each evening, and looked down to watch his feet crushing a surface that responded, gave way and conceded faint prints to be left behind (202).

Sometimes, not often, he sat up and did not move for a long time; then he smiled, the slow smile of an executioner watching a victim. He thought of his days going by, of the buildings he could have been doing, should have been doing and, perhaps, never would be doing again. He watched the pain's unsummoned appearance with a cold, detached curiosity; he said to himself: Well, here it is again. He waited to see how long it would last. It gave him a strange, hard pleasure to watch his fight against it, and he could forget that it was his own suffering.... Such moments were rare. But when they came, he felt as he did in the quarry: that he had to drill through granite, that he had to drive a wedge and blast the thing within him which persisted in calling to his pity (FH 202–203).

◆ *Atlas Shrugged*: Francisco after he has given up Dagny and his work, and decided to assume a new persona for the public. After his initial tortured struggle, when he begs Dagny to help him to refuse John Galt's call to "strike" and to stay with her, Francisco achieves a measure of serenity in the knowledge that his renunciation of his life-goals is necessary for a deeper and longer-lasting success. His house in Galt's Gulch serves as a splendid metaphor for his state of mind in those years of painful renunciation: the "silent, locked exterior" of the house bespeaks sorrow and loneliness—the interior is filled with an "invigorating brightness".

The emotional sum that struck [Dagny]....as an immediate impression of Francisco's house, when she entered it for the first time, was not the sum she had once drawn from the sight of its silent, locked exterior. She felt, not a sense of tragic loneliness, but of invigorating brightness. The rooms were bare and crudely simple, the house seemed built with the skill, the decisiveness and the impatience typical of Francisco; it looked like a frontiersman's shanty thrown together to serve as a mere springboard for a long flight into the future—a future where so great a field of activity lay waiting that no time could be wasted on the comfort of its start. The place had the brightness, not of a home, but of a fresh wooden scaffolding erected to shelter the birth of a skyscraper. (AS 710).

Interestingly, Leonard Peikoff also draws on these facts about the psychology of Rand's heroes to come to the conclusion that "[v]irtue does ensure happiness in a certain sense, just as it ensures practicality" (OPAR, 339), "not the full happiness of having achieved one's values in reality, but the premonitory radiance of knowing that such achievement is possible" (OPAR 340). Peikoff distinguishes between the achievement of existential values, which brings full happiness, and the achievement of philosophical values (the values of reason, purposefulness, and self-esteem), which

brings only “metaphysical pleasure” or “happiness in a certain sense” (my “inner happiness”). Yet he denies that “the achievement of philosophical values,” which we achieve and maintain only through virtue, constitutes a form of success, describing it instead as the achievement of “the ability to succeed.” However, if achieving and maintaining the cardinal values and virtues is not a form of success, but success is necessary to happiness, then it is hard to see how virtue can “ensure happiness” in any sense of the term. To consistently maintain the thesis that virtue ensures happiness “in a certain sense,” Peikoff would have to reject the canonical view that equates happiness with the state of consciousness that results from existential success, and sees virtue as entirely a means to happiness. And, unwittingly, Peikoff does precisely this when, after giving an entirely instrumentalist argument against the con man in terms of his risk of exposure and existential failure, he admits that the con man may get away with his schemes and “win the battle”—but that he is still harmed overall because he will have to “lose the war” (OPAR 270–71). But which war? The war of retaining his contact with reality and his virtues: his independence, integrity, productivity, justice, et al. With this new twist to the argument, even the existentially successful con man suffers a profound harm—the harm of losing his virtues and his contact with reality. In other words, virtue and contact with reality are to be valued not only as means to existential success, but for themselves—for being an essential, defining, part of happiness. The capitulation to the ancient view that the instrumentalist (and survivalist) view was meant to trump is complete—and explicit—when Peikoff states:

The dishonest man....in Ayn Rand’s view....betrays every moral requirement of human life and thereby systematically courts failure, pain, destruction. This is true....even if, like Gyges in Plato’s myth, the liar is never found out and amasses a fortune. It is true because the fundamental avenger of his life of lies is not the victims or the police, but that which one cannot escape: reality itself (OPAR 272).

In other words, the dishonest man is miserable even if he is completely successful existentially, like the shepherd-turned-King in Gyges’ story. And he is miserable for the same reason as Plato’s shepherd-King (or Aristotle’s vicious man): his conception of the good is distorted and his soul, consequently, lacking in harmony.<sup>29</sup> Vice is, indeed, its own punishment, and virtue (to an extent), its own reward.<sup>30</sup>

The case for rejecting the instrumentalist view—the view that virtue is only a means to happiness—in favor of the partly constitutive view is now overdetermined. The instrumentalist view is consistent neither with an adequate analysis of virtue or happiness, nor with Rand’s fiction, nor even with all her major philosophical texts.<sup>31</sup> For as we have seen, some of Rand’s own philosophical statements imply the rejection of the instrumentalist view, and her fiction constitutes more powerful an argu-

ment against it than philosophy alone could ever mount. The wisdom of her art leads her to contradict her own abstractly held positions; it is in her art that we find Rand's truly unique contribution: a dramatization, *par excellence*, of the ancient philosophical claim that morality is in one's own self-interest—and that true self-interest or happiness cannot be defined entirely independently of morality.

(ii) Full happiness

- ◆ *Anthem*: Equality 7-2521 after his escape to the Uncharted Forest.

It has been a day of wonder, this, our first day in the forest (78).

We thought suddenly that we could lie thus as long as we wished, and we laughed aloud at the thought.

Then we took our glass box, and we went on into the forest. We went on, cutting through the branches, and it was as if we were swimming through a sea of leaves, with the bushes as waves rising and falling and rising around us, and flinging their green sprays high to the treetops. The trees parted before us, calling us forward. The forest seemed to welcome us. We went on, without thought, without care, with nothing to feel save the song of our body (79).

- ◆ *Atlas Shrugged*: Dagny and Francisco in the early days of their relationship, before he (apparently) turns into a playboy and their relationship comes to an end. The description of her state of mind after she and Francisco make love for the first time is a good example of the experience of full happiness.

[W]hen she thought that she would not sleep.... her last thought was of the times when she had wanted to express, but found no way to do it, an instant's knowledge of a feeling greater than happiness, the feeling of one's blessing upon the whole of the earth, the feeling of being in love with the fact that one exists and in this kind of world (AS 105-6).

- ◆ *The Fountainhead*: Dominique and Roark after they are united and he has become a successful architect. The passage that captures her happiness best, however, occurs shortly before this, when she decides to leave Wynand and go back to Roark—and the world she has rejected out of fear and disgust.

Dominique lay stretched out on the shore of the lake.... Flat on her back, hands crossed under her head, she studied the motion of leaves against the sky. It was an earnest occupation, giving her full contentment. She thought, it's a lovely kind of green.... The fire around

the edges is the sun.... The spots of light weaving in circles—that’s the lake....the lake is beautiful today.... I have never been able to enjoy it before, the sight of the earth.... I thought of those who owned it and then it hurt me too much. I can love it now. They don’t own it.... The earth is beautiful.... (FH 665–66).

She thought, I’ve learned to bear anything except happiness. I must learn how to carry it. How not to break under it (FH 666).

## VI. Conclusion

We have seen that Rand’s views about the three supreme values and the virtues required for them leads to the view that virtuous activity is itself partly constitutive of happiness. For on this view virtuous activity is both a means to, and partly constitutive of, the three supreme values—reason, purpose, and self-esteem—and these values are both the means to, and partly constitutive of, one’s ultimate value, happiness. More formally:

1. Virtuous activity is both a means to, and partly constitutive of, the supreme values.
2. These values are both a means to, and partly constitutive of, an important part of happiness.
3. Hence, virtuous activity is both a means to, and partly constitutive of, an important part of happiness.

Virtuous activity is inherently deeply satisfying or happiness-making. That is, the satisfaction that comes from virtuous activity is “embedded” in it the way the pleasure that comes from walking along the beach is embedded in the activity. The passages from Rand’s novels discussed above show why this is so. In acting virtuously and, thereby, aiming at, and achieving, our values, we actualize a clear-sighted view of our selves and of external reality. A virtuous life thus brings with it a sense of harmony and of freedom—a justified sense of efficacy, of the power of one’s agency to deal with external obstacles. It is this sort of enduring reality-oriented pleasure and deep satisfaction that is an essential and central part of happiness. It is only when we cease to act virtuously that we lose happiness altogether. Henry Cameron and Steven Mallory, minor characters in *The Fountainhead*, are examples of individuals who allow their existential failures to damage their inner resources, including their capacity for virtuous action. When first introduced to the reader, they are shown as bitter, self-destructive individuals, who are rescued from this state only with Roark’s help and kindness. It is also, of course, possible to never develop one’s inner resources and, therefore, to never achieve happiness. Keating is a case in point.

Insofar as the virtues are a constitutive part of happiness—the supreme end in itself—the virtues are also ends in themselves. But they are also, of course, means to happiness. Full happiness depends on achieving certain states of affairs, which

virtuous acts aim at bringing about. For example, the external or existential aim of a just act is to bring about a just state of affairs. But success in doing so often depends on circumstances that are independent of the agent's actions. Thus, the success of a judge in acquitting an innocent defendant depends not only on his acting justly himself, but also on the others involved acting justly and efficiently, as well as on luck in gathering the evidence. The judge's justice is only one causal factor among others needed for bringing about a just state of affairs. And although occasional failures cannot prevent him from achieving full happiness, it is obvious that repeated failures must. In short, because virtuous action is a means to external success, and because external success is essential to full happiness, virtuous action is also a means to happiness.<sup>32</sup>

It is because it has this instrumental relationship to full happiness that virtue is never sufficient for happiness. As the example just given shows, it is possible to act virtuously, yet fail, through misfortune, to achieve one's most important goals. Such a life, though (necessarily) not unhappy, is not fully happy either. An unqualifiedly happy life is one in which one's actions are largely rewarded by success, and one's sense of satisfaction in one's life is partly derived from this success.

But this, after all, is a commonplace. Rand's lasting achievement is to have written novels that exhibit, as no argument can, the ugliness and self-destructiveness of vice and, in contrast, the attractiveness of virtue as a part of happiness, the happiness of a reality-anchored "capacity for unclouded enjoyment" of life and "an inviolate peace of spirit" (AS 117).

*[Acknowledgements: This paper is an expanded version of a paper I published in Reason Papers (No. 24, Fall 1999) which, in turn, was a descendant of a talk I gave in July 1997 at the Summer Seminar of the then Institute for Objectivist Studies. It also incorporates some material from my "Ayn Rand's Contribution to Philosophy," Reason Papers, No. 23, Fall 1998. My thanks to the IOS/TOC for the opportunity to present it in 1997 and the invitation to publish it in the monograph series, and to Reason Papers and Tibor Machan for permission to use the material from the 1998 and 1999 publications. I would also like to thank Lester Hunt, David Kelley, Chris Swoyer, and William Thomas for their helpful comments on earlier drafts.]*

## Notes:

1. Ayn Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness*, (New York: Signet, 1961), 25/27 (hereafter: VOS). Primary citations are to the hardback edition. Paperback citations are included secondarily in some cases.
2. *Atlas Shrugged*, 35th Anniversary Edition (New York: Signet, 1957), 932 (hereafter AS); *For the New Intellectual* (New York: Signet), 123 (hereafter FNI); VOS, 27, 29/30, 32.
3. See William Thomas and David Kelley, *The Logical Structure of Objectivism*, Beta draft (1999 manuscript).
4. See Roderick Long et al., *Reason and Value: Aristotle versus Rand* (Poughkeepsie: The Objectivist Center, 2000).
5. Taking survival as the ultimate value is only one aspect of the problem; the other is the instrumentalism that is part of the survivalist view. David Gauthier's *Morals By Agreement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986) is, perhaps, the most ambitious attempt to give an instrumentalist justification of morality. But even though he seeks to justify morality in terms of a notion of self-interest that is richer than long-term survival, his conception of morality is still bare-bones compared with Rand's—and still, according to many commentators, too rich for his meager foundations. See Peter Vallentyne, ed. *Contractarianism and Rational Choice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), especially the articles in Part III. For criticisms of the survivalist strand in Rand's justification of morality see Long, *Reason and Value: Aristotle versus Rand*.
6. It does not follow from this, of course, that less-than-full happiness implies a lack of virtue: happiness can be prevented or undermined by psychological or existential factors beyond one's control.
7. Leonard Peikoff, *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* (New York: Meridian, 1991), 328. (Hereafter OPAR).
8. Rand, "Causality Versus Duty," *Philosophy: Who Needs It?* (New York: Signet, 1984). See also David Kelley, *Unrugged Individualism: The Selfish Basis of Benevolence* (Poughkeepsie, NY: Institute for Objectivist Studies, 1996), for an entirely instrumentalist defense of the virtue of benevolence.
9. Lester Hunt, "Flourishing Egoism," *Social Philosophy and Policy*, eds. E.F. Paul, F. Miller, and J. Paul, Vol. 16, 1, Winter 1999, 93 also argues that in Rand's ethics the virtues are constitutive of happiness, or "an essential part of it," although he seems to think that this is unambiguously so. My view, as stated above, is that although this idea is implicit in her writings, especially her novels, her official view is instrumentalist. See also Long's analysis of Rand's ethics as incorporating three distinct, and incompatible, strands: the Aristotelian, the Hobbesian, and the Kantian in *Reason and Value*.
10. More precisely, it is a means in normal circumstances. An act of heroic resistance to tyranny in the cause of justice, but without any expectation of furthering this cause, is only an expression of certain values, not a means to any.
11. Two recent interpretations of Rand's ethics by those who support the survivalist view have adopted this notion of a constitutive relationship to claim that the cardinal values are constitutive of life (Allan Gotthelf, *On Ayn Rand* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1999), 83, and William Thomas and David Kelley, *The Logical Structure of Objectivism*, beta draft, 101–

113). But if this means that every long life embodies self-esteem, reason, and sense of purpose, it is surely false. The self-doubtful or self-contemptuous, the irrational, and the purposeless, may be miserable, but no less healthily and lengthily alive than better examples of humanity. One has only to think of long-lived Mafia bosses to see the point. Even the weaker claim, that these values are important instrumental means to a long life, is false without re-defining these value terms. Thus, if we take “self-esteem” to include both a justified and an unjustified sense of one’s worth, “valuing reason” to include both a rational and an irrational use of one’s intellectual faculties, and “having a sense of purpose” to mean having both rational and irrational goals, then it is true that self-esteem, reason, and purposiveness are important means to a long life. But by this definition practically all of Rand’s villains embody these values in their lives.

12. More generally still, it seems we need emotions not only for practical reasoning—reasoning about action—but for all reasoning. As Ronald de Sousa argues in *The Rationality of Emotion* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), we need emotions to solve the “frame problem,” i.e., the problem of knowing what is relevant and what irrelevant in the mass of data on the basis of which we make inferences, form beliefs, and decide on action (192–96). No amount of information, and no degree of deductive or inductive acumen, would enable us to solve the frame problem if we lacked emotions.
13. Antonio Damasio, *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*, (New York: Grosset/Putnam, 1994). See Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam, 1995) (hereafter EI), for a lively discussion of recent thinking about the emotions, including Damasio’s work (27–29, 52–54).
14. Damasio has since studied 12 patients with frontal-lobe damage and found that they, like Gage, have lost their ability for trustworthy, reliable, responsible behavior, while retaining their IQ, memory, and logical abilities. Damasio’s hypothesis is that when a certain part of the frontal lobe is damaged, and can no longer access the emotional memories stored in other parts of the brain, the individual loses the ability to put things in context and make judgments of importance.
15. Hervey Cleckley, *The Mask of Sanity* (St. Louis: C.V. Mosby, 1964).
16. We have already seen that in Rand’s view, when we act virtuously we give expression to—and, thereby, maintain—the value we place on facing reality (IV, 1 p. 10 above).
17. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, tr. Terence H. Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1985), II.6.1106b36–1107a2 (hereafter NE). This is a somewhat modified version of Irwin’s translation. All further references to Aristotle’s NE are in the text.
18. *The Fountainhead*, 50th Anniversary Edition (New York: Signet, 1971), 191–92 (hereafter FH).
19. J. P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, tr. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956).
20. NE *op cit.*, Irwin trans, 367–368. According to T.H. Irwin, Aristotle is telling us that the base are conflicted between the appetite for immediate gratification and the wish for long-term gratification. When they give in to their appetite, they regret not acting on their wish for long-term gratification, but when they act on their wish, they regret not having satisfied their appetite. I believe Aristotle attributes this sort of conflict to the truly vicious, but a different conflict to the base, those who habitually desire and act wrongly without having totally lost sight of, or desire for, the right.
21. There is a suggestion in the text that Rand thinks that the city is seen veridically only when it is seen as an achievement, and not also as sodden. But my interpretation is both compatible with the text and more accurate as a description of the city.

22. Some of the best evidence for the importance of normal emotional development to normal cognitive development comes from studies of autism. Autistic people show an inability to understand complex personal relationships and emotional nuances due to neurological abnormalities that prevent normal emotional development. See Temple Grandin's autobiographical account in *Thinking in Pictures* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), especially ch. 4, "Learning Empathy."
23. "Typically," because even in adults emotions like fear and anger can sometimes be primitive, pre-conceptual phenomena, and often (though not always) usefully so in emergencies. The neurophysiological basis of this phenomenon is explained in EI 9–20.
24. This might suggest, misleadingly, that the intellectual and emotional faculties reside in different parts of the brain. But, despite uncertainty over many aspects of the nature of the human mind and brain, scientists and philosophers engaged in the enterprise of understanding them are agreed that the intellectual, emotional, perceptual, and motor functions are spread over different parts of the brain, forming a network of connections through a complex system of signals. Another area of general agreement among scientists is that the human mind extends beyond the brain. In Sherwin Nuland's words, "What we call the mind is an activity, made up of a totality of the innumerable constituent activities of which it is composed, brought to awareness by the brain. The brain is the chief organ of the mind, but not its only one. In a sense, every cell and molecule in the body is part of the mind, and every organ contributes to it. The living body and its mind are one—the mind is a property of the body" (Sherwin B. Nuland, *The Wisdom of the Body* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997)), 349. See also Candace Pert, *Molecules of Emotion: Why You Feel the Way You Feel* (New York: Scribner, 1997), who coins the word "bodymind" to express the same idea.
25. In comments on an earlier version, William Thomas pointed out that Rand's novels often show her characters coming to realize consciously the truth or falsity of their emotional responses. This is true but compatible with my point that Rand often shows her characters as legitimately accepting the validity of their emotional responses over their intellectual judgments *prior* to any such conscious realization—and often without any such realization at all.
26. It is worth noting that Rand does not always conceive of pride as the virtue of moral ambitiousness; sometimes she conceives of it, the way Aristotle does, as a second-order virtue: the virtue of holding oneself in high regard for one's virtues. Aristotle calls pride in this sense the crown of the virtues, possible only to someone who has all the virtues to the highest degree. In this sense, it is almost identical with the value of self-esteem (another reason for questioning the dominant view that there is no conceptual connection between virtue and value). This comes through clearly in the passage describing Dagny's first sight of John Galt's face in *Atlas Shrugged*: "[It was] a face that bore no mark of pain or fear or guilt. The shape of his mouth was pride, and more: it was as if he took pride in being proud" (AS 647). The "pride in being proud" suggests that "pride" here has two meanings: the first-order virtue of moral ambitiousness and the second-order virtue of high regard for oneself for one's virtues, including that of moral ambitiousness.  
David Kelley and William Thomas also recognize the two meanings of pride, distinguishing between pride as "taking credit for one's accomplishments of character" and pride as "taking responsibility for enhancing one's self-esteem, for building one's character, for being worthy of life" (*Navigator*, Vol. 2, No. 13, 2000, 16–18).
27. In comments on an earlier draft, David Kelley questioned the conceptual connection I make between virtue and value by pointing out that "a person might actually have a good character but fail to attend to himself and appreciate his own merits, and thus not feel the self-esteem to which he is entitled." This is true, but the question is whether he can have the full-fledged virtue of pride—moral ambitiousness—without self-esteem, i.e., without the sense

of being capable and worthy of the happiness that comes from having the good character at which pride aims. Since the ultimate end of pride, as of any virtue, is one's own happiness, a person who can act with pride must have some sense of himself as being capable and worthy of happiness, and a person with the full-fledged virtue of pride must have achieved the full-fledged value of self-esteem. In addition to this conceptual connection there is also, as I say in the text, a psychological connection between pride and self-esteem: self-esteem provides the motivation to act with pride.

28. Ayn Rand, *Anthem* (New York: Signet, 1995), 50th Anniversary edition, 50–51.
29. Peikoff's attempt in a footnote to save the uniqueness of Rand's approach by claiming that Plato appeals to other-worldly consequences and Aristotle to "the (undemonstrable) principle of the mean" (OPAR 471, n. 25) reveals a vast unfamiliarity with the texts. It is well known that both Plato (*Republic*, especially Bks. II-IV and VIII-IX) and Aristotle argue (see p. 21 and note 20 above), explicitly and in great detail, that the wicked man suffers in the here and now. There is plenty that is unique in Rand's writings, but the point about vice being psychologically self-destructive is as old as human wisdom.
30. Indeed, Peikoff puts it even more strongly—and even more inconsistently with his other statements—when he says that someone like Roark is "a happy person even when living through an unhappy period" (OPAR 339–400).
31. See also Rand's statement about Kira: "The heroine dies radiantly endorsing life, feeling happiness in her last moment because she has known what life properly should be" (cited in Tore Boeckman, ed. *The Art of Fiction* (New York: Plume, 2000), 174). Thanks to William Thomas for bringing this passage to my attention.
32. Elsewhere I have also argued that virtuous activities and attitudes are partly constitutive of certain goods, such as friendship (see my "Friendship, Justice and Supererogation," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, V. 22, 2, April 1985, 123–131.) Thus, the virtues of benevolence and of justice are partly constitutive of the best (i.e., most enduring, meaningful, and fulfilling) friendships. If friendship is a means to happiness, then it follows that virtue is a means to happiness in yet another way.

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# Commentary

## Evolution, Psychology, and Happiness A Reply to Neera Badhwar

Jay Friedenberg

### I. Introduction

My purpose in this comment is to review some of the interdisciplinary literature on happiness and relate it to a number of points made by Neera Badhwar. This literature supports the idea of happiness as a goal to be sought after as described in the instrumentalist view, as well as a part of action as stated in the constitutive view. The issue of whether life according to Rand, or happiness according to Badhwar, is the ultimate value is next addressed. This debate depends on whether happiness is a value or an emotion. Rand appears to define happiness as an emotion, in which case it need not vie for the position of ultimate value.

I then introduce the evolutionary perspective on happiness. In evolutionary theory survival is always the ultimate “value” because it determines all traits including happiness. I then discuss some aspects of evolutionary theory as it relates to happiness, including hypothesized differences between ancient and modern times and how such differences account for our current state of happiness.

Next, I describe basic aspects of the neurobiology underlying rationality and emotion. This biology allows both for rational determination of virtuous action as Rand states and for emotional influences on virtuous action. Finally, I present evidence in support of Badhwar’s claim that values and emotions are present before the intellect can influence them. They are present at birth due to evolutionary selection forces and acquired through learning during early development.

### I. Happiness: Goal or Process?

Badhwar describes Rand’s instrumentalist view of happiness that states that virtues are a means to happiness. In this conception virtues and happiness are independent. In contrast, Badhwar advocates a constitutive view of happiness where happiness is part of and partially dependent on virtue. This view sees the virtues as ends unto themselves (9–10).

In this section, I describe psychological research on happiness that supports aspects of both the instrumentalist and constitutive views. This work shows that happiness can be obtained as the result of certain actions. That is, happiness may be an end to which actions are directed. The virtue of these actions—or lack thereof—is not relevant to my argument. What I wish to show is that happiness can be experienced as the result of certain activities.

Other work in psychology, however, demonstrates that happiness is also constitutive of action, i.e., it happens simultaneously with the performance of an action. Here, the execution of the action produces happiness, so the action is justifiably an end unto itself.

### 1. Happiness as Goal

In recent years, researchers in the field of psychology have paid increased attention to happiness. Many studies have examined those factors that affect happiness. Much of this work defines happiness as “subjective well being.” This term receives a variety of interpretations, but is most often characterized as self-perceived happiness or satisfaction with life. This feeling of happiness is in some cases defined as a high ratio of positive to negative feelings. This subjective emotional estimate is in contrast to objective—one might say intrinsic—measures of well-being such as physical and economic indicators, also used to evaluate quality of life (Myers, 1993). Happiness as reported in this section refers specifically to the conception of happiness as subjective well being.

There are fairly large reported differences in individual happiness. In these studies, one person may report greater happiness than another. Such differences are probably due to lifestyle factors. Research on this topic shows certain lifestyle factors are consistently related to perceived self-happiness, while others are not. Happy people tend to have high self-esteem, be optimistic, outgoing, and agreeable, have close friendships or a satisfying marriage, have work and leisure that engages their skills, have a meaningful religious faith, and sleep well and exercise. Conversely, happiness is unrelated to age, sex, education levels, having children or not, and physical attractiveness (Myers, 2000; Myers & Diener, 1996). The philosophical issue of whether these correlates are virtuous is not addressed in this work.

It should be noted that the causal connection between the above-mentioned factors is not entirely clear, and it is possible that these are correlations that do not imply a cause. However, to such a degree as they are causative and open to choice, we can alter our lifestyles to improve happiness. If we were to consider some of the above-mentioned factors as virtues, then practicing them should lead to the attainment of happiness as a value. This fits with the instrumentalist view of happiness as the end result of virtuous action. This research therefore supports the instrumentalist notion of happiness as a goal. Since we can work toward happiness, it also implies happiness is something that to a certain degree is within our power to change.

## 2. Happiness as Process

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) has documented numerous cases of people who reported they felt happier if engaged in challenging work or leisure activities compared to passive pursuits. He coined the term “flow” to describe the resulting focused and unself-conscious state of merging completely with the activity. In this conception “flow” and being happy are integrated, i.e. are the same experience. Thus happiness (or an important aspect of happiness) is constituted by flow, and flow is thus a constitutive, not a “merely instrumental” (9) means to happiness.

To sum up, happiness research based on lifestyle strategies and flow supports a two-system view of this emotion. The work on lifestyle strategies suggests happiness can be a goal to be sought after through certain actions. The work on flow shows happiness occurs during action as well. The first, instrumental view sees happiness as a goal toward which virtuous action is directed. The second fits Badhwar’s constitutive idea of happiness happening during the execution of virtuous action itself. We see then that some studies describe means to happiness that seem mostly instrumental, while studies of flow describe a constitutive means. There is thus evidence for means of both types.

## II. Life versus Happiness as the Ultimate Value

According to Badhwar’s interpretation of Rand, survival is the ultimate value and the virtues serve survival, as does happiness. Badhwar’s alternative conception is that happiness is the ultimate value, itself also serviceable by virtues. This argument as to which is the ultimate value, survival or happiness, depends on what one considers a value. Rand, in my reading of her work, defines life as the standard of value. But Rand does not explicitly refer to happiness as a value. Rather, she considers it an emotion or state of mind that results from achieving other values. If one defines happiness this way, then this argument becomes questionable, since a value, being something one acts to gain or keep, is distinct from a feeling that may result from such an action.

Rand states that survival (i.e., life) is the ultimate value. She goes on further to state that the idea of value is based on life, that only a living being can value anything: “Epistemologically, the concept of “value” is genetically dependent upon and derived from the antecedent concept of “life”. To speak of “value” as apart from “life” is worse than a contradiction in terms. It is only the concept of ‘Life’ that makes the concept of ‘Value’ possible”(Rand, 1964, 7).

Rand saw survival and happiness as intertwined. She believed an individual survives or achieves the value of life only by pursuing rational goals. This pursuit then naturally results in a state of happiness. “The maintenance of life and the pursuit of happiness are not two separate issues. To hold one’s own life as one’s ultimate value, and one’s own happiness as one’s highest purpose are two aspects of the same achievement. Existentially, the activity of pursuing rational goals is the activity of

maintaining one's life; psychologically, its result, reward and concomitant is an emotional state of happiness." (Rand, 1964, 25). This last passage implies happiness is the psychological result of life-furthering action, life being the value driving the action, happiness being a co-occurring state of mind.

But logically, happiness itself seems to be a prime candidate for an ultimate value. It makes sense that if our basic survival needs are met, we would next turn to pursuing happiness. Shouldn't happiness be the ultimate value? Badhwar argues that many values in the modern world have little to do with survival, and prime among these is happiness. She says that happiness is not essential to life and is not a necessary means to survival (7). Badhwar holds that happiness ought to be the ultimate value and that a person's actions should be directed toward this end.

The crux of this dispute appears to be definitional. Rand does not strictly define happiness as a value, that is, as something that one acts to gain or keep (although I think she would agree that one could consider it as such). She instead describes happiness as an emotional state or state of consciousness resulting from the life-promoting actions of rationally pursued goals. In fact, she describes it as a feeling, not a value, that does not contradict other values: "Happiness is 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 own destruction..." (Rand, 1961, 150). These descriptions suggest Rand thought of happiness as an emotion rather than a value. She refers to it as a corollary of rational value pursuit rather than a value itself. If Rand considers happiness an emotion, as these readings imply, then the question of whether it should compete with life as the ultimate value is nullified. Happiness then becomes a side-effect or symptom of properly pursuing life as the ultimate value.

### III. Evolution and Value

In this section, I introduce an alternative perspective on life and happiness. According to evolutionary theory, life is always the ultimate value. It is not a value consciously pursued by an individual in the philosophical sense, but a key force in the formation of any organism's traits, the capacity for happiness itself being a trait. Because all traits for any species are selected for on the basis of survival, any trait must therefore be considered subordinate to it. In this sense, evolutionary theory is more in line with Rand's view of life as the ultimate value. Happiness in this view is a trait like any other that has helped our species adapt to changing conditions.

Before discussing the evolutionary perspective on happiness and survival, I want to briefly compare some of the differences between it and philosophical conceptions of these ideas. In philosophy, a value is something of usefulness or importance to an individual. The individual can acknowledge the value and engage in actions to obtain it. The individual thus has some control over selecting which values he or she wishes to pursue. Furthermore, these pursuits or actions occur over the short run within the individual's own life-span.

In evolutionary theory, a value is any trait that contributes to survival. Traits more important to survival have greater value. The unit of analysis in evolution is the species, not the individual. The survival of a single individual actually has little meaning, since particular individuals have only a marginal impact on the robustness of their species. Individuals—human or otherwise—in this view also do not need to be consciously aware of their traits or of how valuable they are. They simply possess traits that are adaptive or not. The individual organism can therefore be said to be blind to values; he or she acts somewhat automatically in ways dictated by their traits, these traits and the values they serve already having been selected for by the environment. In evolution, actions occur in the long run over multiple reproducing generations, they are not so much the actions of single individuals but the “actions” or selection forces of the changing environment.

Evolution thus favors Rand’s conception of survival as the ultimate value. Although we may not consciously practice happiness in order to survive, it was at some point in our ancestral history crucial to surviving and so its expression persists with us to this day. Because happiness may not be a necessary means to survival now does not mean that it did not at some time in the past. There are many examples of traits that may have been more adaptive in the past than now. As long as these traits don’t impose a survival cost, they persist.

Animals with adaptive physical or psychological traits are better equipped to deal with local conditions, survive, and pass on these traits to their offspring. Rationality, one of the three cardinal values in Objectivism, has obvious survival value. A thinking animal can design tools to manipulate the environment, plan for the future, solve problems and communicate ideas through language to others, allowing for complex coordinated social behavior. The ascendance of *Homo Sapiens* as the dominant species on this planet is undoubtedly due to selection forces acting in favor of rational capacities.

But emotions also serve adaptive purposes and can be of value. Darwin (1872) saw emotions as adaptive because they are communicative. In most species, there is a unique expression associated with a specific emotion. For example, a threat display of bared teeth in some primates reflects anger and the willingness to fight over food or mate. An opposing animal interprets this display and can back down, avoiding injury. Ekman (1992, 1993) labels six primary emotional expressions in humans: surprise, anger, sadness, disgust, fear, and happiness. Each of these has potential survival value. Surprise may signal the presence of novelty. Anger draws attention to an interfering event and motivates its elimination (Buss, 1989). Sadness may induce an individual to give up ineffectual behaviors. Disgust promotes learned aversion to toxic stimuli (Garcia & Koelling, 1966). Fear and anxiety may produce vigilance and alertness. Happiness, among other purposes, is associated with reproductive success and in the formation of social bonds (Buss, 2000). The relationship between happiness and evolution is discussed in much greater detail next. It should be noted that the capacity to experience an emotion like happiness is the result of selection pressures,

although its actual experience in our day-to-day lives depends on a variety of contextual environmental factors.

## IV. Happiness and Evolution

In this section, I further elaborate on the role evolution may have played in selecting for human happiness. Following David Buss (2000), I outline possible differences between our ancestral environment and the modern world. These differences may account for our current state of happiness. If happiness arose as an adaptation to ancient human conditions that no longer exist, then it may be possible to improve happiness by reinstating these conditions. I conclude by evaluating three problems with the evolutionary perspective.

### 1. Evolutionary Barriers to Happiness

If emotional capacities evolved because they were adaptive during our ancestral past, then it is an interesting question to ask whether they continue to be adaptive in the present day. There are large differences between the modern world we now inhabit and the Paleolithic era. It is therefore possible that emotional reactions that once served us well in a given context are now a hindrance. The evolutionary psychologist David Buss (2000) argues that many of the conditions that used to foster human happiness no longer exist. Several of these conditions are described below.

One difference between today's world and that of the past is the ubiquitous presence of mass communication and media. Buss states these influences have given us unreasonable expectations concerning mate selection. In one set of studies, men's commitment to their regular partners was lowered after viewing images of attractive women. This was in comparison to a control group who viewed images of only average attractiveness. Similarly, women shown images of dominant high status men showed less commitment to their male partners (Kenrick, Gutierrez, & Goldberg, 1989; Kenrick, Neuberg, Zierk, & Krones, 1994). Such unreasonable expectations can lead to unhappiness in the form of increased infidelity, marital strife and divorce. Exposure to attractive images can also have a negative effect on self-concept. Women who viewed attractive pictures of other women rated themselves less attractive and lower in self-esteem (Gutierrez, Kenrick, and Partch, 1999).

According to one view early humans evolved in extended kin networks, small groups of 50 to 200 individuals (Dunbar, 1993). In these groups individual skills and achievement are more highly valued. Mass communication in the modern era according to Buss makes us all part of one large competitive group where we compete with the best in the world. This sets unrealistically high standards for achievement. Additionally, the nuclear family does a poor job of providing intimate social support, which is more easily provided for in extended kin groups. This may account for the higher rates of depression found in more economically developed countries (Nesse and Williams, 1994).

Negative emotions served a functional purpose in our ancestral past. Their subjective experience produces unhappiness, but was and may still be adaptive. Two examples are jealousy and anger. A well-supported hypothesis is that sexual jealousy evolved to combat threats to valued long-term relationships (Daly, Wilson, and Weghorst, 1982; Symons, 1979). Those who were jealous in the past were better able to defend a mate against rivals. Buss has proposed that anger draws attention to an interfering event and motivates its elimination (Buss, 1989). Historically, men and women faced different types of interfering events and so should get angry at different events. Empirical evidence bears this out. Women get angrier than men at male sexual aggression, sexual harassment and rape. Men get angrier than women at being led on sexually and at the withholding of sex (Buss, 1989; Studd, 1996; Thornhill and Thornhill, 1989).

## 2. Undoing Evolution to Improve Happiness

One way to improve happiness may be to acknowledge and correct for the influence of evolutionary forces. Buss (2000) makes several suggestions in this regard. One approach is to make modern times more like ancestral times in certain respects. He suggests that increasing closeness of extended kin may go a long way toward improving happiness. Close kinship relations may in the past have helped to reduce incest, child abuse and spousal battering. A second idea is to develop deep friendships. The sign of a true friend is one who helps in times of trouble. According to Tooby and Cosmides (1996) though, there are fewer critical events (natural disasters, health problems, theft and murder) in the modern world to help us distinguish true from fair weather friends. As a result, the number of deep meaningful friendships in contemporary life may be inadequate.

An alternate way to improve happiness is to avoid situations that trigger a negative emotion. By selecting a similar long-term mate or marriage partner, one can reduce the likelihood of jealousy and infidelity. A large body of research shows that stable long-term relationships are characterized by couples with similar interests, values, and personalities (Whyte, 1990). Competitive situations also trigger negative emotions. A way to combat this is to promote cooperation. Cooperation is more likely to occur under conditions of mutual dependency or shared fate (Sober and Wilson, 1998). This happens for instance, when a group must defend itself against attack or work together to hunt or gather food.

We can also promote happiness by allowing for the expression of innate desires arising from evolutionary influence. These include health, professional success, intimacy, and self-confidence (King & Broyles, 1997). Fulfillment of mating desires is another example. Married people are happier than singles when other variables such as age and income are controlled (Diener, Suh, Lucas, and Smith, 1999). Furthermore, spousal partners who fulfill the personality traits of agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness report greater marital satisfaction (Botwin, Buss, and Shackelford, 1997).

### 3. Evaluating the Evolutionary Perspective

There are a number of common criticisms pointed at evolutionary explanations of human behavior. The first is that such explanations are necessarily post-hoc: one reconstructs a picture of what life was like for early man based on existing evidence and then uses those conditions to explain our current state. A second criticism is that such explanations presuppose innate ideas or values. In other words, they suggest we have a gene that programs us to be happy or sad, perhaps in response to a particular triggering event, when there is no current data to support the idea of specifically behavioral or emotional genes that do this. Finally, some critics have commented that evolution smacks of biological determinism, because it does not allow for free will or choice on the part of an individual.

In support of evolutionary theory, I would like to counter these three points. The post-hoc argument depends largely on the accuracy of knowing what evolutionary conditions were like. In some cases, there is available information to perform a valid reconstruction of past events. For example, changes in climactic conditions can be surmised via alterations in geological formations. The time of the climatic change can then be correlated with changes in the fossil record. Other explanations, for example, those that rely on an understanding of predation and prey avoidance, are reconstructed from less reliable evidence.

In regard to the second argument, it is entirely plausible that genes code for the development of brain structures, which then give rise to innate psychological states. All humans feel hungry if they go without eating. The anatomical and physiological processes underlying hunger in man and other animals are fairly well understood, and involve activity in various nuclei of the hypothalamus. The development of the hypothalamus is the result of genetic coding and hypothalamic activity are linked to feelings of hunger and satiety. It is therefore not implausible for genetically coded brain areas to produce specific emotions like happiness. Indeed, modern research has identified those brain regions that become active when experiencing a specific emotion.

The evolutionary view does not negate the role of free will and the human capacity to make decisions that can run counter to genetic engineering. The brain contains a rational as well as an emotional component each discussed in greater detail later in this comment. Cognitive thought processes can over-ride instinctive emotional reactions. For that matter, separate thoughts also compete with one other to determine behavior. Most actions are the result of activity in not just a single brain area, but in multiple areas each interconnected and mutually influencing one another. It is perhaps best then to think of evolution as influencing or imposing constraints on behavior rather than determining it.

## V. Cognition and Emotion

Badhwar argues that virtues should be emotional dispositions as well as cognitive ideas. It is not enough for instance to know that we need to get along with others, we must feel that it is right too. While Rand placed emphasis on the cognitive faculty in making moral judgments that in turn affect proper action, Badhwar argues we cannot also ignore the role of emotions, i.e., moral dispositions, in making moral judgments. Research in neurobiology shows there are two brain systems, evolved to deal with rational and emotional judgments respectively. These systems are interdependent, they both work together to determine actions. This interdependence allows for the mutual interaction of thought and emotion in guiding action. Here, I discuss a number of issues concerning this interaction, including the relationship between conscious and subconscious evaluations and emotion. The evidence presented is in agreement with Badhwar's view that emotions, as well as rational cognitive processes, motivate actions.

Rand makes a number of definitive statements about cognitions, emotions and their relationship. She asserts that we have a distinct cognitive mechanism in addition to an emotional mechanism. The content of both is empty at birth, but later determined by cognition. She states the cognitions program the emotions, that the programming consists of values and that these values determine our emotional reactions: "Man is born with an emotional mechanism, just as he is born with a cognitive mechanism; but, at birth, both are "tabula rasa." It is man's cognitive faculty, his mind, that determines the content of both. Man's emotional mechanism is like an electronic computer, which his mind has to program - and the programming consists of the values his mind chooses (Rand, 1964, 27).

Badhwar differentiates between our intellectual understanding of our moral principles and our moral emotional dispositions. She states that both influence the performance of virtuous acts (12). When they are in conflict, the result is moral unreliability. Badhwar gives the example of a person who intellectually values respect for other's opinions but emotionally hates those who disagree. An ideal individual in this conception acts virtuously as the result of consistent moral principles and dispositions. Her argument is that Rand placed too much emphasis on the rational determination of values, ignoring the fact that emotional dispositions allow for and can enhance virtuous action. Badhwar sees dispositions as necessary for moral judgments and proper moral action.

I agree with Badhwar on this point. Evidence from neurobiology shows two different centers in the brain. One is devoted to emotion, the other to rational and cognitive capacities. Both are capable of mediating virtuous action separately. Research shows that these centers are functionally interdependent, so the two structures in combination can also mediate virtuous action. In this section I wish to show that the interaction between rationality and disposition has a biological foundation.

## 1. The Neurobiology of Cognition and Emotion

Rand was correct in stating we have both a cognitive and emotional mechanism. Most of our intellectual capacities such as planning, problem-solving and language have been linked in numerous studies to the cortex. Specific emotions like fear and anger are associated with parts of a brain area called the limbic system. The limbic system developed first in evolution. The cortex evolved later and sits on top of the limbic system (Finlay and Darlington, 1995).

One reason our intellect and emotions are not well integrated is because the cortex and limbic system operate alongside one another. Evolution in this case has acted additively. Unlike an engineer, who might act on principles of minimalism and efficiency, evolution does not eliminate one part of an organism because another, perhaps better, part supersedes it. It keeps old parts even if they no longer serve a useful function as long as they don't interfere with survival or reproductive capacity. An example of this is the appendix. Its role in digestion is unknown, yet because it doesn't jeopardize survival it remains as a vestigial organ in humans. A similar situation exists for the limbic system. Emotions in all likelihood have continued to be adaptive and so it remains in modern day humans along with the cortex. To paraphrase Aristotle, the result is that man is a rational *and emotional* animal.

However, these two brain areas do not operate in complete functional autonomy. A wide body of evidence shows interconnections between them. The consequence of this is that our thoughts and emotions mutually influence each other. As early as 1937, Papez proposed a neural theory of emotion in which inhibitory connections from the cortex could dampen activity in the limbic system. In support of this idea is the finding of sham rage, where cats with their cortex removed exhibit threat displays to neutral stimuli like being petted on the back (Bard, 1929). The rage response originating in the limbic system of these cats triggered by the petting could not be inhibited, as would normally occur. In contrast, cats with both their cortex and limbic system removed exhibit no sham rage.

Moyer (1983) lists additional evidence supporting cortical inhibition of aggressive behavior. In one study, the aggressive leader of a caged monkey colony had an electrode implanted in his cortex. A button causing this electrode to fire reduced his aggressive behavior. The button was placed in the cage and a submissive monkey learned to press it whenever the dominant male became too threatening. In one case study, a normally calm woman had an electrode planted in the amygdala (part of the limbic system) for a diagnostic procedure. When the doctor activated the electrode she stood up and began to strike him. Alcohol also plays a role. Only aggressive people are more likely to become violent when they drink (White, Brick, and Hansell, 1993). One view on this is that alcohol is disinhibitory: it impairs the cortex's ability to inhibit the limbic system, allowing free reign to an individual's normal aggressive tendencies.

In summary, the neurobiological evidence points to the conclusion that in humans and in other animals there are separate cognitive and emotional brain centers,

each of which developed at a different point in evolutionary history. However, there are also neural connections between these centers. These connections and behavioral studies demonstrate the two areas are not functionally independent. Rather, they are inter-communicative. Thus, both rational and emotional activity in these centers can separately serve as a guide to action, while actions can also result from their interaction. Support for this idea additionally comes from psychological studies showing we have cognitive control over our emotional reactions. This is discussed in greater detail in the following section.

## 2. Conscious and Subconscious Emotional Reactions

It is obvious from everyday experience that conscious judgements influence our emotional reactions. These judgements can be cognitive interpretations of a situation. In this case, according to Rand, we can alter the resulting emotion by altering our interpretation. That is, we can change our conscious evaluation and consequently our value system, a process she referred to as “programming.”

Schacter (1966) has empirically verified the idea that emotions can be the direct result of a conscious interpretation. In a classic study, he had one group of students injected with adrenaline, inducing physiological arousal in the form of increased heart-rate. This group was told about the effects of the adrenaline. In another condition, subjects were injected with adrenaline but told it was a vitamin mixture. Both groups were then individually forced to spend a long time sitting in a waiting room. In the waiting room was a confederate who complained about the long wait and acted obnoxiously by pacing back and forth, throwing crumpled paper into a wastebasket. The first group reported feeling no emotion. They attributed their arousal to the injection. The second group reported feeling angry at having to wait. Many directed their anger toward the disruptive confederate. Schacter concluded that emotions are the result of arousal followed by interpretation and that the type of interpretation determines the type of emotion.

But we can also experience emotion without conscious judgement or thought. In these cases it seems hard to alter the emotion, since there is no cognitive reprogramming that can take place. The Objectivist view of this is that the emotional reaction is the result of a subconscious evaluation, itself the result of prior cognitive judgements of which we were aware. In this view, the subconscious evaluations themselves can be altered over time by the consistent practice of appropriate conscious judgements. The result is that even subconscious emotional reactions are themselves alterable.

There is psychological evidence in support of this notion as well. Cognitive therapies observe that events are often followed by a belief that in turn gives rise to an emotion. Psychological disorders occur when the belief following an event is misguided. For example, a client who was just fired may believe he is worthless and that life is hopeless, creating depression. A healthy individual who loses a job may instead believe that his boss is a jerk and that he deserves something better (Myers, 2001). Albert Ellis (1993), the creator of rational-emotive therapy, points out that

those with disorders have illogical, self-defeating attitudes and assumptions in response to negative life events. These attitudes, since they were learned in some cases over many years, can be automatic and unconscious. His therapy consists of teaching new, more constructive ways of thinking. The goal is for the patient to have a rational and more positive cognitive reaction in response to future negative events. Another therapist, Aron Beck, uses similar techniques in treating depressed patients (Beck, Rush, Shaw, and Emery, 1979). Both have met with some success in working with their clients. This work shows that even subconscious evaluations can over time be altered to produce more optimal emotional reactions.

## VI. Emotion and Value Precede Cognition

Ayn Rand's controversial view on emotion is that we consciously and rationally select values. These values then give rise to our emotions. Badhwar says this "programming" scenario may be true for adult humans but not in children who have yet to develop reason, or in animals who do not possess a sufficiently developed rational faculty. Badhwar argues that early in development we acquire values based on emotional responses, long before an intellect is around to determine or select them. She states that we make value responses based on feelings prior to value judgments based on reason (23). I agree entirely with this conception that we have values and emotional responses to serve them before adulthood. Evolutionary theory shows that values and emotions can be innate. Psychological research demonstrates that they are also learned during childhood. This evidence runs contrary to Rand's notion of strictly rationally-determined values and emotions. It shows emotions arise from alternate non-rational sources, in accord with the validation not promulgation theory of emotion.

### 1. Emotion and Value are Hereditary

Emotions are present in the evolutionary framework because they serve survival-oriented and reproductive-oriented ends. These ends are values because the organism is predisposed to achieve them in certain situations: the organism acts to keep them. In the evolutionary perspective, animals are born valuing survival and reproduction, and emotions are one of the evolutionary mechanisms in place to ensure they act to obtain them.

Imagine walking through the woods and stumbling upon a bear. For many of us, this stimulus would arouse the appropriate emotion of fear. In the evolutionary account, this fear serves to motivate a particular response, in this case running. The running ultimately serves the value of survival. The emotion has served an adaptive purpose in that it mediated an organism's response to a specific situation, telling it how to act. Evolutionary theory states these actions are performed in pursuit of the preprogrammed values of life and reproduction.

But are these emotional reactions innate or learned? In the aforementioned

example, do we fear bears because we have learned they are dangerous or are we instinctually afraid of them? If such reactions are learned, we might not expect all individuals to fear a real bear. Children for instance who have grown up with teddy bears and who think of bears as cuddly may not experience such fear. Research on phobias sheds some light on this issue. A phobia is a debilitating and irrational fear in response to a specific stimulus, be it an object, activity, or situation (Myers, 2001). Common examples include batrachophobia (fear of reptiles) and acrophobia (fear of heights). Twin and family studies show that genetics contribute to phobias as well as other anxiety type disorders (Fyer, Mannuzza, Martin, Aaronson, Gorman, Liebowitz, and Klein, 1990). If phobias are partially innate, then evolutionary forces had a hand in their formation. Individuals in the past who feared such things as snakes and avoided them escaped harm and so passed on their predispositions. Phobias are thus another instance of evolutionary preprogrammed emotions serving survival needs.

## 2. Emotion and Value are Learned

The distinction in psychology between nature and nurture accounts of behavior is fundamental. The evolutionary views discussed above correspond to the nature point of view. They state that certain traits or capacities are in place from birth. In the nurture view, the interaction between an organism and its environment determine traits. Here, changes aren't shaped by evolutionary forces throughout the history of the species, but by learning within the life-span of a single individual.

Learning plays a key role in emotional development. In classical conditioning, an emotional response formerly triggered by a specific stimulus becomes associated with another. The story of Little Albert is a tragic example. J. B. Watson was an early Behaviorist. He presented Albert, a young child, with a white teddy bear and followed it with a loud noise (Harris, 1979). After repeated pairings Albert's fear response originally elicited by the noise was eventually induced by the bear. Furthermore, stimulus generalization occurred. Little Albert ultimately became fearful of other white fluffy objects that resembled the bear. Albert's emotional reactions may have been permanently changed as a result of these experiences.

Another example of the role of experience in emotion comes from observational learning. Bandura (1977) showed that pre-school children are more likely to copy aggressive behavior modeled by an adult if the adult goes unpunished. If learning affects our emotions and our emotions in turn influence our values, then learning can secondarily shape values. A child who has learned to become scared of many things may as a result come to value conformity and fear confrontation. Another child who has learned to act aggressively from modeling his father may instead value rebelliousness and forthrightness.

## 3. The Promulgation and Validation Views

Eric Mack distinguishes between the promulgation and validation views of emotion (Mack, 1986). In the promulgation view, "all of one's convictions, values,

goals, desires, and actions must be based on, derived from, chosen and validated by a process of thought” (Rand, 1964, 26). According to this perspective, emotions are the result of a conscious reasoning process. That is, they originate only from cognitive processes. Rand is explicitly advocating the promulgation view when she says our emotions are “tabula rasa” at birth and that only later in life do we choose values that give rise to our feelings. In contrast, the validation view allows emotions to come from a variety of sources, rational or otherwise. The role of the intellect is to select and evaluate them to determine if they are appropriate means to action. The promulgation view thus sees reason as coming before and after emotion, the validation view sees reason as only following it. Badhwar supports the validation view when she argues emotions and other predispositions are in place before development of the intellect. The evolutionary and learning mechanisms listed previously are two pre-rational sources of emotion. As such, they support the validation view of emotions as originating from wellsprings other than pure reason.

Rand’s view on emotion needs to be reconsidered in light of these ideas. All our values are not selected for de novo by the adult intellect. As organisms shaped by evolutionary forces, we come into the world predisposed to respond in specific situations to achieve certain values. Our emotions and values systems are then further modified through interaction with the environment. We already have values before we intellectually know what they are or decide which ones to follow. Rand fails to acknowledge these forces of nature and nurture that precede an intellectual value selection process. Her philosophy places overt emphasis on cognitive factors in value formation. I agree with Rand that we can cognitively reprogram or alter our values later in life. But the above evidence shows this programming is a secondary process, laid down on top of an existing value system. A complete theory of value formation must therefore consider these hereditary and experiential factors and how they interact with willfully imposed changes.

## VII. General Conclusion

Although I have touched on a number of wide ranging issues in this comment, my main goal has been to evaluate the philosophical claims presented by Rand and Badhwar against perspectives from different disciplines. Findings in these disciplines shed light on some of the difficult arguments presented here. In particular, I propose that evolutionary theory serve as a useful framework within which to view the debate over survival and values. Since survival leads to the creation of traits like the capacity for happiness, it suggests that life is the ultimate value, in agreement with Rand. There are plausible reasons to believe that evolutionary forces in our ancestral past selected for our capacities for happiness and that our happiness in the modern world may be improved by understanding such conditions.

Work in experimental psychology suggests happiness may be both a goal to which action is directed as well as a process resulting from such actions, in accord

with the instrumentalist and constitutive views. The results of findings in psychology and neurobiology also show there are both rational and emotional brain centers with a complex set of connections between them, allowing for rational and emotional control of action. Work in this field additionally supports the idea that there are conscious and subconscious influences on emotion and that some emotions and values are in place before an intellect can influence them.

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# Commentary

## Philosopher-Novelist, or Novelist and Philosopher? A Reply to Neera Badhwar

Lester H. Hunt

It has been with great interest that I have followed the development of Neera Badhwar's "Is Virtue Only a Means to Happiness?" through its various versions. It has undoubtedly influenced my views on more than one of the topics she discusses. What I plan to do here is to make a first attempt at sorting out where I agree with it from where I disagree, and both from what I am just not sure about. Her essay is by now so tangled with my own thinking on these issues that this is a somewhat confusing task, at least for me. I only hope I will not confuse anyone else.

Perhaps the one thing I like most about this essay is the fact that it potentially could serve to open discussion of Ayn Rand from a point of view that is unfortunately seldom taken in discussions of her work, a point of view in which she is seen as a philosopher who expressed herself in narrative as well in overtly philosophical essays. For some reason, the secondary literature on Rand's philosophy very seldom takes advantage of the fact that so much of her writing is fictional. For the most part, references to her novels takes the form of quoting the Aesopian disclosures she puts into the mouths of her characters, or recounting fictional episodes as illustrations of ideas that, it is assumed, are really understandable without any reference to these episodes. As Badhwar ably shows, Rand's fiction—not merely the speeches she gives to her characters, but the narrative itself—can make a much more radical sort of contribution to our understanding of her philosophy. They are themselves philosophical documents and, as such, can complement her more directly philosophical writings. They might also mount a case for views that are alternative to her explicitly stated theories.

Unhappily, though Badhwar has now shown the way, I do not expect large numbers of people to follow her example. The ability to understand philosophical essays is a very different one from the ability to interpret fictional narrative: they are in fact in a certain way not merely different abilities but *opposite* ones, inasmuch as it is difficult for one person to master both. At all events, now that the trail has been blazed, we have less excuse for our failure to walk it than we had before.

The philosophical problem upon which Badhwar focuses is an issue that is likely to be AN all-important one for anyone who holds, as Rand does, a virtue-based ethical egoism: the problem of the relationship between virtue and happiness. This issue raises a host of others, having largely to do, of course, with the nature of virtue and the nature of happiness. On several of the more important of these issues, Badhwar finds that Rand's essays and her fiction differ sharply. Four of the differences she alleges seem to me particularly important.

First, the novels, as she sees the matter, suggest a rather different conception of happiness from the one that is explicitly stated in the essays. In her overtly philosophical discussions, Rand consistently describes happiness as a certain concomitant of existential success: it is an emotional accompaniment of action that achieves values. In the novels, however, she often depicts characters as achieving a sort of happiness even though circumstances prevent them from achieving their values. They are happy simply because of their inner resources of mind and character: ultimately, they are happy simply because of their virtues.

Second, partly on the basis of the first point of difference, Badhwar sees the novels as embodying a conception of the relation between virtue and happiness that is to some extent different from Rand's stated views on the matter. Her tendency in the essays is to speak of virtue as simply a means to happiness. The novels, however, imply that the virtues are to some extent constitutive of happiness: the relation between them is not simply the external one of means and end. It is closer than that.

The third difference is closely related to be second and the third. Rand says that standard of value is life. This, as many people have pointed out, could either mean that things have value simply to the extent that they promote survival, or it could mean that they have value (at least in part) because they make life better. Rand's explicit statements on this matter, according to Badhwar, generally take the survival option. The novels, on the other hand, partly because they suggest that the relation between virtue and the good life is not merely that of means and end, suggest a non-survivalist alternative.

The fourth difference is related in complex ways to all of the others. In the essays, Rand's comments on the relation between virtue and the emotions are generally negative, stressing the ways in which emotions figure crucially in bad thoughts and actions. Her most familiar and characteristic pronouncement in this area is that emotions are "not tools of cognition." The novels, on the other hand, indicate that emotions make a positive contribution to virtue. In them, virtue is depicted as an integrated intellectual *and* emotional disposition. It is a disposition not merely to act, but to think and to feel in certain ways. Thus emotions are partly constitutive of virtue.

Finally, Badhwar claims that on each of these points the novels represent a position that is more philosophically adequate, closer to the truth, than the essays. In fact—and I should stress that for Badhwar this is a *good* thing—the view of virtue embodied in the novels is much more like Aristotle's than it is like Rand's stated

position. It has, she claims, several of the distinctive features of Aristotle's position, including the doctrine that virtuous action lies in a mean between opposed vices. For some elements of this position Rand's fictional writings constitute the most powerful argument.

I think the overall effect of Badhwar's discussion—an effect that may be to some extent unintended—is to diminish Rand's stature as a philosopher. Badhwar does praise Rand as a novelist, but she praises the novelist at the philosopher's expense. In fact, the philosophy she praises the books for expressing is not Rand's but Aristotle's. Moreover, the depth and width of the divide she sees between the essays and the novels tends to deprive Rand of two cardinal intellectual virtues of the philosopher: clarity of mind and consistency. If Badhwar is right, Rand would seem to be a rather confused person.

Of course, there is no reason *a priori* why she must be wrong about this, but my own view is that she is. Rand seems to me a more lucid and integrated thinker, and a better philosopher, than Badhwar gives her credit for. To justify my judgement would require me to address issues concerning the interpretation both of Rand's fiction and her essays, and to look into a profusion of philosophical issues as well. Unfortunately, what I will be able to do here must fall far short of that.<sup>1</sup>

I will limit myself more or less to commenting on the fourth of the points listed above, the one that has to do with the emotions. Not only is this topic centrally located, in that it has relatively close relations to the other important issues Badhwar treats, but I think it is the one on which she has the most—and probably the most interesting things—to say.

Her main contention here is that the principle that “emotions are not tools of cognition” is false. She gives, as I understand it, two main arguments: First, although it is true that emotions can lead us astray, it is also true that “beliefs can be mistaken and reasoning off-track just as easily as emotions” (24). Second, if we were to construct an adequate theory of the way knowledge actually functions in human life, we would have to integrate the emotions as a positively functioning part of the whole picture (23).

The first of these arguments rests on the assumption that the issue addressed by Rand's principle could be settled by seeing whether the emotions that people in general experience are more frequently wrong than the reasoning that they do. Rather obviously, whether an issue can be settled in this (or any other) way depends on just what the issue is. Suppose, for the moment, that the issue here is approximately the following. Whenever one feels an emotion, there is, because of the sort of emotion it is, some way that things *seem* to the person who experiences it. If I experience fear of a bat flying around my head, at that moment the bat appears dangerous to me. If I experience a wave of revulsion at seeing a pair of gay men walking down the street, at that moment they seem wicked and unnatural to me. The issue, let us suppose, is this: Does any particular type of emotion constitute evidence, in and of itself, to the effect that the way things seem at the moment really are the way things are? Is the emotion

itself evidence that the seemings that are part of the emotion are in fact not mere seemings but realities? The answer to this could indeed be “no,” even though, say, human emotions are in this way veridical one third of the time, while the reasoning that people do is only right one quarter of the time. There are several reasons why this is so. I hope one or two of them are obvious enough without further comment. Further, I think that the issue Rand means to address is at least very close to the one I have just described. The error she means to expose and indict is that of the person who believes that God exists because he feels that He does, or that of the one who believes that homosexuality is evil because it turns his stomach. In such cases, emotions are functioning as if they were overwhelming evidence that their constitutive seemings are the way things really are.

Admittedly, I am loading the dice here by selecting as examples inferences that do seem to be fallacious. Badhwar would point out that people’s feelings are often such that they really should act on them. I believe this is true, but I think it is actually compatible with what Rand means.

Consider, as an illustration, basic plot situation devised by screenwriter Ben Hecht for the classic Alfred Hitchcock film, *Spellbound*. Dr. Constance Petersen, a psychiatrist on the staff of a sanatorium in the Vermont countryside, has fallen in love with Dr. Edwardes, the establishment’s new director. It soon becomes clear from his suddenly erratic behavior that the new director is not Dr. Edwardes at all, but a deeply deluded amnesiac. The real Dr. Edwardes recently disappeared and cannot be found. As is pointed out in the dialogue, the false Edwardes probably wouldn’t have taken on his current identity unless he knew that the real one would not be entering the scene and spoiling his act. This would be hard to account for unless he was present when the real Edwardes was disposed of. As several characters point out, by all the publicly available evidence, the most likely hypothesis is that Constance’s lover killed Edwardes and, in order to conceal his guilt from himself and others, took on his victim’s identity. This would mean that he is a very dangerous homicidal psychotic.

Constance will have none of this. She tells her mentor, Dr. Brulov, that the reason she refuses to accept the publicly available evidence is, quite simply, the way she feels: “I couldn’t feel this way toward a man who was bad.” Brulov responds with derision: “She couldn’t love him if he was no good! This is baby talk, nothing else!” According to Brulov’s Freudian point of view, love is an emotional fixation having deep irrational or non-rational causes, which generally have to do with one’s early childhood. On such a view, the idea that feeling of love can somehow trump publicly available evidence concerning the goodness or badness of the love-object is ridiculous.

Since Constance is also a Freudian, she is unable to make a satisfactory reply. I think, however, that she might at least make a start at one if she were to begin with another, decidedly non-Freudian view of the matter. The view I have in mind would go like this. Love is an emotion or a more complex psychological phenomenon in which emotions are a major component. Emotions in general are estimates of the

values of objects in one's world. They are automatic results of value judgements—many of which one was not conscious of at the time—that have been integrated by one's subconscious. If she were to make use of a theory like this one—and also assume, as she and Brulov clearly do, that amnesia does not alter one's basic moral character—then she could argue that her emotions have must caught an array of details, many of which she did not consciously notice or does not remember, the overall purport of which is that this man is not the sort of person who would be able to do what he is accused of doing.

As some readers will have noticed by now, the view I have just imagined Constance adopting is actually Rand's own view, as stated by her a few pages after the familiar pronouncement that emotions are not tools of cognition.<sup>2</sup> That is, her stated view could be used to *justify* someone in drawing conclusions from their emotions. Why, then, does she say that these same emotions are not tools of cognition? A plausible answer would, I think, go something like this. The fact that Constance loves this man only comes to have the force of evidence in a certain context: this context consists of a causal story of the sort that I have imagined her telling Brulov, in which her feelings are explained as having arisen from an array of micro-judgements of a certain sort and, most importantly, it also consists of the evidence (in the form of well-grounded beliefs) that she has for believing this explanation is true. What has ultimate evidentiary power here is the explanatory story and the well-grounded beliefs. The reason why the theist's feelings of faith and the bigot's feelings of revulsion are—not merely poor evidence, but—no evidence at all is that the this context is entirely lacking.

In and of itself, the experience of love is not evidence. Some women are actually attracted to men because of traits that—though they do not think of them this way—are actually dangerous vices, or have a strong psychological connection with malevolent behavior. If such a woman were to fall in love with the false Edwardes, it might actually be evidence that this man is indeed capable of committing the crime of which he is accused—though that is probably not the conclusion the woman herself would draw.

This suggests another point which I think is crucial for understanding the implications of Rand's position on the emotions. Whether one should follow one's emotions or not depends on what sort of person one is: one must have values that are sound, and one probably would also need a certain kind and degree of self-awareness. According to Rand, this would mean that it is only in a rational person that one's emotions can be guides reliable guides. People whose basic outlook on life is irrational ought to distrust their emotions.<sup>3</sup> The view expressed in Rand's essays, then, would seem to imply that the question of whether one should follow one's emotions does not have a single answer. It has two of them, which depend on what sort of person one is.

Both of these answers, I think, are fully reflected in the novels. Notice that the examples Badhwar cites of Rand characters whose emotions provide them with veridical clues to the nature of reality are all instances of characters whose basic mode

of mental functioning is one that Rand would regard as rational. There are also many examples one could cite of *irrational* characters whose emotions prove not to be veridical, where following feelings as a guide actually leads the character to his or her destruction. Such examples are so numerous that picking cases out may be unnecessary, but probably the most poignant and memorable is the series of events in *The Fountainhead* in which Peter Keating sacrifices his love for the unprepossessing Catherine Halsey and follows instead the various pangs, urges, and fears that lead him to seek the approval of others (including, most especially, Catherine's uncle).

Admittedly, what I have said so far misses a major part of Badhwar's objection to Rand's stated view of the emotions. The view I have attributed to Rand makes the relationship between emotion and intellect very strongly hierarchical: emotion is important, but reason really should in some sense be in control. Badhwar complains that Rand takes the relationship between intellect and emotion to be "unidirectional" (23). I take this to mean that Rand thinks that the only proper relationship between intellect and emotion is one in which the intellect is cause and emotion is the effect of that cause. I have said nothing to show that Badhwar is wrong about this. Moreover, as she points out in what might be the most constructive and interesting part of her essay, it does not seem that this relationship can be unidirectional in this sense. Emotions play an indispensable role in the way knowledge functions as a part of human life. They serve as "somatic markers" that provide the human mind with virtually instantaneous estimates of which features of the immediate environment are more and which are less important. They attract one's attention to those objects which appear to call for thought or action. As such, they obviously influence what the contents of the intellect will be. The direction that my attention takes in the present will make a considerable difference concerning what sorts of data will be available for future cogitation. If the intellect influences the emotions, the emotions also influence the intellect.

Once again, I must say that I think that these plausible ideas are quite compatible with what Rand's stated doctrine says and implies. As I have sketched it here, it neither says nor implies that the relation between intellect and emotions should be *unidirectional* in the sense specified; it only requires that the relationship be *asymmetrical*. The may influence one another, but the nature of the influence must not be the same. In particular, the influence that emotion has on the intellect must not be one that it has by functioning as evidence in the particular way I described above. Emotions that function as "somatic markers" do not seem to violate this requirement at all. If I understand it rightly, this function of the emotions does not seem to constrain the content of one's intellect in the way that evidence does. It evidently involves something more like setting problems to be solved rather than the solutions to be arrived at.

I should emphasize that, although I think Rand's fiction and her essays are much more consistent than Badhwar takes them to be, I think she is right to say that they are very different, and that they are substantively different in ways that are philosophically important. One of the most important differences can be found in a

topic I have touched on here: the nature of love. As far as I know, there is no sustained discussion of this topic, or of the (for Rand) closely related topic of the nature of sex, in all of her essays.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, love and sex are major thematic components of her novels. In *Atlas Shrugged*, they constitute a subject that is not only equal in importance with, but parallel to the subject of capitalism. In fact, it is a large part of the point of the book that these two subjects — capitalism on the one hand and love and sex on the other — can be treated in this parallel fashion. One might say that the essays express Rand’s “masculine” side while the novels embody her “feminine” side. To find her views on subjects like love, sex, friendship, and the positive role that emotions play in life, one must go to the novels. The relationship between them and the essays, however, I see as one not of contradiction but of complementarity.

## Notes:

1. For a treatment of some of the most relevant issues, see my “Flourishing Egoism” in *Social Philosophy and Policy*, vol 16 no. 1, Winter 1999, 72–95. See also *Character and Culture*, (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997).
2. “The Virtue of Selfishness,” in *The Virtue of Selfishness: A New Concept of Egoism* (New York: Signet, 1964), 27. I have actually adapted her own words in my statement of it. What she says there is this: “Just as the pleasure-pain mechanism of man’s body is an automatic indicator of his body’s welfare or injury, a barometer of its basic alternative, life or death — so the emotional mechanism of man’s consciousness is geared to perform the same function, as a barometer that registers the same alternative by means of two basic emotions: joy and suffering. Emotions are the automatic results of man’s value judgements integrated by his subconscious; emotions are estimates of that which furthers man’s values or threatens them, that which is *for* him or *against* him — lightning calculators giving him the sum of his profit or loss.”
3. “If [a person] chooses irrational values, he switches his emotional mechanism from the role of his guardian to the role of his destroyer.” “The Virtue of Selfishness,” 28.
4. The closest thing I can find is “Of Living Death,” in the posthumously published *The Voice of Reason: Essays in Objectivist Thought* (New York: New American Library, 1988), 46–63. This very minor essay is a critique of a papal encyclical on sex and birth control.

# Commentary

## Why Virtue is a Means to Our Ultimate End A Reply to Neera Badhwar

David Kelley

Neera Badhwar takes issue with Ayn Rand’s moral theory on two fundamental points: 1) She rejects Rand’s view that life is the ultimate value and argues that happiness should play this role instead. 2) She rejects Rand’s view that virtue is a means to achieving values rather than an end in itself, and argues that virtue is at least partly an end-in-itself, insofar as it is constitutive of happiness. Many of the observations she makes in the course of her argument are well-taken and enrich our understanding of the Objectivist ethics. Nevertheless, I think the theoretical framework she uses to interpret her observations and to structure her argument is flawed. In this comment I want to discuss what I see as the most important flaws, particularly in regard to Badhwar’s claim that happiness is the ultimate moral value.

### Life and Happiness

Badhwar does not use the terms “life” and “happiness” in quite the same way as Rand, and we need to understand this terminological difference before we can assess her substantive argument. To clarify these terms and provide a consistent, neutral vocabulary with which to examine the arguments, we need a three-way distinction among survival, flourishing, and enjoyment.

By *survival* I mean being alive in the literal sense, continuing in existence. By *flourishing* I mean existential success in pursuing and acquiring an array of values. Plausible examples of such values include career, romance, friendship, art, and self-esteem, but we would need further analysis and argument to determine that these or any other particular values are in fact required for flourishing. The concept of flourishing is the concept of success as such, leaving open the question of what criterion to use for measuring success. The point of the concept is to provide a contrast with survival—the notion of a “full” life as opposed to “mere” life. By *enjoyment*, finally, I mean the range of positive emotions—from joy itself to quieter states of serenity and contentment—that normally accompany existential success. I am thus distinguishing enjoyment, as the psychological aspect of well-being, from flourish-  
*Objectivist Studies 4* (Poughkeepsie, NY: The Objectivist Center, 2000): pp. 61–71.

ing as the existential aspect.<sup>1</sup>

We can use these terms to formulate the terminological difference between Rand and Badhwar. Rand tends to incorporate survival and flourishing into a unitary concept of life. When she distinguishes life from happiness, she uses the latter term to refer narrowly and specifically to enjoyment. Badhwar, by contrast, tends to incorporate flourishing and enjoyment into a unitary concept of happiness. When she distinguishes happiness from life, she uses the latter term to refer narrowly and specifically to survival. Understanding this difference will help us understand Badhwar's critique of Rand's view.

## Rand's Ethological Approach to Ethics

Let me begin by summarizing the familiar contours of Rand's view, using the terminology I have outlined. Rand's fundamental argument for life as the ultimate value turns on the basic meaning of life as survival. The argument turns on the claims a) that life versus death is the fundamental alternative any organism faces, including humans; and b) that what makes this alternative fundamental is that it is equivalent to the alternative of existence versus nonexistence (VOS 16).<sup>2</sup> Survival need not mean momentary survival, and for Rand it clearly doesn't. As a goal for an organism's action, survival can be taken to mean continued existence through the whole of its natural lifespan. Survival can also be taken to mean its continuing existence as the *kind* of organism it is, in possession of the same essential properties.<sup>3</sup> For humans, this implies the continuing ability to think and choose by means of reason, at least at some minimal level. But at this stage of Rand's analysis, we are still talking about survival rather than flourishing, the alternative of existence versus non-existence rather than a happy life versus a disappointing one.

Rand goes on to argue that in order to maintain its existence any organism must meet its needs by exercising its capacities for action. These needs and capacities are determined by the organism's nature, and thus vary from one species to another. For any species, they imply a range of specific values to be sought as means to the ultimate end of survival, and a range of specific types of action by which to achieve those values. The same general analysis applies to humans, but with a major difference in degree. The range of human needs is more complex and varied than for other animals, and our capacities for action more powerful. We have spiritual and social as well as material needs. We meet these needs through capacities for reason, self-awareness, and choice; for production and creativity; and for the control of action through abstract principles and long-range goals. As a result, humans have a large and complex constellation of values that are rooted in one way or another, directly or indirectly, in the requirements of survival.

For Rand, ethics as a branch of inquiry is analogous to ethology in the life sciences. Ethologists like Konrad Lorenz and Karl Von Frisch wanted to understand animal behavior, not in terms of its proximate causes such as reflexes or conditioning,

but rather in terms of its teleological function. Their goal was to understand the mode of life of each species—its particular way of surviving in a particular environment, given its particular needs and capacities. Rand saw ethics as a kind of human ethology; her concept of “man’s life qua man” is really an ethological concept of man’s mode of life. As such, it incorporates both survival and flourishing. For humans as for plants and animals, to flourish is to thrive in the enterprise of life: to satisfy our needs abundantly through the vigorous and efficacious use of our capacities. The values constituting the state of flourishing are established *as* values—i.e., proven to be valuable—by showing how they meet our needs, or enable the use of our capacities, and thereby contribute to our long-term survival. Leading a full life is the only way to achieve mere life—securely and over the natural course of a lifespan.

Moving on to happiness, the third of our core concepts, Badhwar notes quite rightly that Rand sometimes uses the term interchangeably with “life,” and sometimes uses it to refer specifically to an emotion. The apparent ambiguity is understandable, however, in light of the account of happiness in “The Objectivist Ethics,” her fullest presentation of her ethical theory. One essential thesis in this account is that life and happiness are two aspects of the same ultimate purpose:

The maintenance of life and the pursuit of happiness are not two separate issues. To hold one’s own life as one’s ultimate value, and one’s own happiness as one’s highest purpose are two aspects of the same achievement. Existentially, the activity of pursuing rational goals is the activity of maintaining one’s life; psychologically, its result, reward and concomitant is an emotional state of happiness...(VOS 32).

“Happiness” in this passage clearly refers to enjoyment. On the other side of the equation, the concept of life incorporates flourishing (“the activity of pursuing rational goals”). But for the reasons outlined above, those rational goals are not detached from the goal of survival (“the maintenance of life”); they are elements in our mode of survival as humans. Thus the equivalence of life and happiness as purposes depends on the internal complexity in Rand’s concept of life.

A second essential thesis in Rand’s account of happiness is that it cannot serve as the fundamental *standard* of value. A purpose, for Rand, is a concrete state of affairs that one seeks to bring about, whereas a standard is an abstract principle one employs to evaluate alternative means of trying to achieve the purpose. The point of a standard is to guide deliberation about what derivative goals to seek and what actions to take in pursuing them. Rand argues that happiness cannot provide such guidance precisely because it is an emotion. An emotion is a response to things we take as having value significance for us, and what we take as significant depends on what we have already chosen to value. Thus a hedonist standard of value is circular; it amounts, as Rand puts it, to saying “‘the proper value is whatever you happen to value’...”(VOS 33).

Rand's fundamental reason for denying that enjoyment can be a standard, however, is that emotions are not tools of cognition. "To take 'whatever makes one happy' as a guide to action means: to be guided by nothing but one's emotional whims" (VOS 32). An emotional standard of value does not necessarily track the objective requirements of long-term survival and may not even yield an internally consistent set of values. Thus if happiness means more than enjoyment-at-a-moment, if it means enjoyment with some degree of stability over time and across the major areas of life, then we can achieve it only by using an objective, non-emotional standard. For Rand, of course, that standard is the ethological one described above.

To summarize: Survival, flourishing, and enjoyment are essentially connected as aspects of a single ultimate value. Survival is the fundamental alternative we face, and the maintenance of life in this sense is the ultimate value. This value, together with the facts about our various needs and capacities, provides the standard by which we can tell that health, production, self-esteem, friendship, and various other things are themselves values, and are thus elements in a flourishing life. Enjoyment, finally, is the emotional response to achieving these values.

This is, if you will, the "survivalist" interpretation of Rand's ethics, but I do not think her philosophical writings will support any other interpretation. I also think the core elements of this interpretation are essential to a viable Objectivist ethical theory. And Badhwar's analysis runs into difficulties where it departs from this framework.

## Flourishing and Survival

In the first section of her paper, Badhwar challenges the link between survival and flourishing, as in the following comments:

[1] The premise that all genuine human values can be explained or justified as promoting long-term survival lacks empirical support.... There is no evidence that literature or philosophy are [necessary for longevity] (6).

[2] ... we can, and many do, survive perfectly well without achieving—or even trying to achieve—meaningful careers or intimate friendships (8).

[3] if Rand's virtues were necessary for survival, the human species would surely have died out a long time ago. Instead, the species has multiplied beyond anyone's wildest predictions a hundred years ago—while its moral state has remained more-or-less steady (8–9).

In effect, Badhwar claims that survival is too simple a task to require such

things as literature, philosophy, careers, and friendships; and is thus too thin a foundation to support a moral theory in which these count as values. But she offers no evidence for this sweeping negative claim.

Of course the primary burden of proof is on those who assert the positive. The viability of Rand's ethological approach to ethics depends on actually making the connection between flourishing and survival, which means showing how such things as art and friendship are needs of human survival. To describe these as needs is to say that their presence or absence makes a significant difference to a person's prospects for long-term survival. Such causal claims must be supported inductively by the appropriate analysis and evidence. On this score it is fair to say that the Objectivist program in ethics is far from complete.

But it is not a mere promissory note, either. Rand herself explained why she thought that life requires each of her core values, from production, to philosophy and art, to political freedom<sup>4</sup>. Leonard Peikoff has elaborated these points, fleshing out the connections among the values. Nathaniel Branden has added a wealth of psychological evidence, especially in the case of self-esteem and personal relationships. This body of work needs to be developed more fully and tested more rigorously, but one cannot simply claim that the derivations in question are impossible without examining the work that has already been done. Badhwar nowhere discusses any of this literature.

The third comment I quoted is particularly surprising in this regard. The population growth that Badhwar mentions is the result of rising standards of living and advances in medicine; which are the result of productive work, saving and investment, scientific discoveries, and new technology; all of which are the result of human rationality and productiveness. I am not sure what Badhwar means by her offhand remark that mankind's moral level has not changed. But the dramatic gains in both population and longevity—longer lives for more people—is surely substantial evidence for the link between Rand's virtues and survival. By the ethical standards of Objectivism, large numbers of people have regularly been committing virtuous acts. And what has happened since the Industrial Revolution is only a dramatic and intensified form of what has been true throughout history: humans have always survived by thought and work. However difficult it may be to trace spiritual values like art and friendship back to the needs of survival, it is surely not hard to see the connection in the case of material needs and the exercise of our capacities to meet such needs.

## Flourishing and Enjoyment

Rand's thesis that survival is the ultimate value and the grounding for all values is an effort to show how values can be objective. If one does not rely on this Objectivist mode of deriving values, then one must either provide some other theory of how values can be grounded in fact, or else hold that value claims are subjective. In this regard, I see two internal difficulties in Badhwar's thesis that happiness rather than life is the ultimate value, quite apart from her critique of Rand's view.

The first problem is meta-ethical. It comes to the surface in the following passage:

even granting the ... proposition that morality must be founded on a fundamental choice, the choice of life over death is not the only choice that can serve as the foundation of morality. The choice of a happy life over, say, a secure or hedonistic or fame-filled life, can also provide a foundation. Hence, from the moral point of view, the choice of happiness can be the most fundamental choice (7).

If Badhwar accepts Rand's meta-ethical principle that values presuppose goal-directed action in the face of an alternative, she needs to explain *why* happiness is the fundamental alternative we face. The alternative of happiness versus security (or pleasure or fame) is not, on face of it, of the same order of fundamentality as Rand's alternative of existence versus nonexistence. Suppose that someone chooses fame rather than happiness. Presumably Badhwar believes that this choice would not necessarily affect his survival, so he will remain in existence as a human agent. How are to think of him? Is he immoral for having chosen the wrong fundamental value? Or are his actions beyond moral appraisal because he has opted out of the foundation of morality? If, on the other hand, Badhwar does not accept Rand's meta-ethical principle, then her case is incomplete without some other analysis of value concepts that can establish their objectivity.

The second internal problem pertains to the substantive principles of an ethics based on happiness. Badhwar says "it is the requirements of human happiness, rather than human survival, that constitute the standard and foundation of ethics"; and again, "Rand's virtues are necessary not for survival, but for happiness." As we have seen, Badhwar incorporates flourishing and enjoyment in her concept of happiness. So the question is: which of them actually serves as the standard?

Suppose that enjoyment is the standard. This interpretation is suggested by Badhwar's statement that "rational values can be understood as values the pursuit or achievement of which is [1] inherently enjoyable and, [2] under normal circumstances, *compatible* with ... our survival"(8, emphasis in original). Since she denies that survival gets us very far as a standard—and specifically that it does not require art, philosophy, friendship, etc.—it is presumably their enjoyability that makes them values. Though she denies that happiness means "whatever happens to feel good to an individual" (8), it does seem that enjoyment is serving here as the effective standard of value, the standard of what does and does not contribute to a successful, flourishing life. And then we face the usual problems with a hedonist standard of value, including the arguments that Rand offered.

Suppose, on the other hand, that flourishing is the standard: we determine whether some goal-state is truly a value by asking whether it is a means to or component of flourishing. The problem is that Badhwar does not define the concept of

flourishing, except to deny that it can be anchored in the requirements of survival. She provides no positive account of flourishing as a condition of life except, implicitly, through her references to the values like friendship that she thinks are elements in flourishing. But if flourishing is defined by enumerating its components such as friendship, then it is an empty and unsupported tautology to say that friendship is a value because it contributes to flourishing. Following her claim that we can survive without meaningful careers or intimate friendships, she asserts that “failure to pursue or achieve these values makes a dent in our happiness” (8). Why? Is it because pursuing and achieving the values contributes causally to the condition of happiness-as-flourishing? Then Badhwar owes us an account of this condition. Or is it because flourishing just is the set of these values? In that case the claim that their absence “makes a dent in our happiness” is empty.

## Virtue and Enjoyment

So far I have been concerned with Badhwar’s view about life and happiness as ultimate ends. I want to conclude by addressing her second basic challenge to Rand, which takes up the bulk of her paper: the claim that virtue is an end in itself and not merely a means to the ultimate end. Badhwar’s thesis is that “virtue is partly constitutive of happiness” (10).

What does this statement mean? What fact or facts would make it true? We have noted that in speaking of happiness, Badhwar means either flourishing or enjoyment or both. But we also need to look more closely at the concept of “constitutive.” This term refers at root to the part-whole relationship, and accordingly Badhwar says that virtue is only a part of happiness. In ethical theory, however, the term is also used to distinguish two sorts of relationships between means and ends. Instrumental means contribute causally to an end but are not in any way part of that end. Putting on one’s glasses, for example, is an instrumental means of reading the small print. Constitutive means are part of the end itself, in the way that discriminating the black letters from the white paper is an inherent component of reading the words. The significance of the distinction, of course, is that when we are dealing with an end regarded as ultimate, an end-in-itself, something sought for itself, a constitutive means shares in that characteristic.

How then do we distinguish between a (merely) instrumental means to a given goal and a constitutive one? Badhwar seems to offer two criteria. In some contexts she treats virtue as constitutive of happiness because virtue is intrinsically enjoyable (19–20). In other contexts the criterion seems to be that happiness cannot be defined independently of virtue (6); or that virtue and happiness are not distinct, externally-related states of affairs (10). Putting together the distinct elements in happiness, and the different criteria of being constitutive of an end, Badhwar’s statement has two likely interpretations, both of which I take her to be affirming:

1. Virtuous activity can be (and for a virtuous person is) intrinsically enjoy-

able, not merely something we have to do in order to obtain the values that are sources of enjoyment.

2. Virtuous activity is essential to flourishing in the sense of being not only a causally necessary condition but also a fundamental aspect of flourishing, without which the latter cannot be defined.

The first thesis seems both true and compatible with the Objectivist ethics. We can certainly take enjoyment from activities as well as from the ends achieved by those results. Badhwar notes that Rand shows the characters in her novels taking joy in the activity of producing, not just in the wealth that results; in thinking, not just in the knowledge they acquire from it; and in dealing honestly with each other, not just in the trust and respect they earn thereby. Nor do I see anything in the theoretical framework of the Objectivist ethics that is incompatible with these observations.

But thesis (1) is of limited significance for Badhwar's overall position, because the emotion of enjoyment is not a reliable guide to the objective means-end relationships among our values. To follow Badhwar in taking examples from Rand's novels, Gail Wynand in *The Fountainhead* took a fierce joy in wielding power over others, on the mistaken premise that power is necessary for happiness. Badhwar has much to say about the role of emotion in virtue that I agree with and think should be incorporated into the Objectivist theory of virtue. In particular, her view that virtues in their fullest development involve a condition of inner peace and alignment with our values is profoundly true—and is strongly connected with the conception of happiness as a state of non-contradictory joy. At the end of the day, however, the experience of an emotion is not evidence for the truth of the value judgment implicit in the emotion. Even when we have enough confidence from past experience to trust our “gut reactions” in certain circumstances, as Badhwar herself notes, “Knowing when to rely on one's emotions, and when to discount them, is the better part of self-knowledge” (24). This self-knowledge is a function of reason.

There's another reason why the experience of an activity as intrinsically enjoyable is of limited value in telling what is and is not an end in itself: the fact that even for a person with a fully rational hierarchy of values, enjoyment can easily spread down the hierarchy from ends to means. Consider, for example, a chore like taking out the garbage. Surely this is not an end in itself; it is an instrumental means of creating a healthful and aesthetically pleasing environment. But someone who grasps this connection and holds it in mind might take intrinsic satisfaction in performing the chore as a concrete embodiment of the values it serves. We might even say that for a person who always keeps the context of his goals in mind, and does not act from duty, the activities of creating a clean and attractive surroundings *should* take on the same intrinsically enjoyable character as the goal itself. But none of this implies that taking out the garbage is even partly constitutive of our ultimate values.

Thesis (2), by contrast, *is* incompatible with the Objectivist ethics. As we

have seen, Rand holds that there is an internal structure among the values that make up the condition of flourishing, a hierarchy with the maintenance of life at the base and other values serving that ultimate end. I made this point earlier solely in terms of values, as states of affairs we seek to obtain, but it also applies to virtues. Badhwar attributes to Rand the view that “virtue... is only an instrumental means to value” (9). I think this is correct. Virtue may be intrinsically enjoyable—the issue raised by thesis (1)—but that is not the issue here. We are concerned here with flourishing as the condition of existential rather than psychological success. Virtue is a morally important constituent of this condition, but it is not the fundamental constituent and is thus not essential in a way that requires it to be included in the definition of flourishing.

Virtue is a derivative aspect of flourishing in the sense that what counts as a virtuous action, policy, or trait of character depends on prior assumptions about what things are valuable. If the highest value in life were honor, for example, as in the Greek ethos celebrated by Homer, then the roster of major virtues would be quite different from that prescribed by Objectivism. Courage in battle and skill in the political arts that bring power and fame would take the place of productiveness. The virtue of pride would be of the comparative type illustrated by Ajax, who killed himself when he was not awarded Achilles’ armor, rather than the self-contained pride of a Roark. In regard to intelligence, we would prize the guile of Odysseus rather than the guileless objectivity of Galt.

Badhwar’s fundamental reason for believing that virtue is an essential component of happiness, as far as I can see, is that the cardinal virtues of rationality, productiveness, and pride are constitutive of the cardinal values reason, purpose, and self-esteem, respectively.<sup>5</sup> Badhwar stresses that these cardinal values have an internal character, at least in the sense that they are not subject to the vicissitudes of circumstances outside our control in the way that health and wealth are. Even so, she needs to explain why each of the cardinal virtues is so intimately connected with its corresponding value that the latter cannot be defined without it.

Rand’s discussion of the cardinal values, as far as I know, is confined to a pair of brief and rather elusive statements,<sup>6</sup> and her interpreters have not done much to clarify the concept. As a result, the differences between rationality and reason, productiveness and purpose, and pride and self-esteem are among the least-developed areas of Objectivist theory. Nonetheless, the principle of charity in interpretation suggests that when Rand described the second item in each of these pairs as a value, she intended the description to include her global characterization of value as such and her distinction of value from virtue: “Value is that which one acts to gain and/or keep—virtue is the act by which one gains and/or keeps it” (VOS 27). Thus reason as a value must be something like one’s faculty for thought and/or the conceptual awareness of reality that results from using it, whereas rationality is the action of using it: choosing to think, to accept facts as facts, to exercise intellectual initiative in pursuing knowledge, and to take responsibility for the truth of one’s conclusions. This distinction is not affected by enriching the conception of virtue-as-action by recognizing that virtues involve dispositions, commitments, and various cognitive and emo-

tional elements. We still have a basic distinction between the value we achieve and the means by which we achieve it.

Why then does Badhwar believe that the means (partly) constitute the end? Working through each of the virtue-value pairs, she makes some or all of the following points in each case:

1. If one values the end (reason, purpose, self-esteem), then one must act in accordance with the means.
2. If a person does not practice rationality, he cannot truly value reason, and similarly for productiveness and purpose, pride and self-esteem.
3. Possessing the value enhances the motivation for practicing the virtue.

These points are surely all true, but they do not establish that the virtues constitute the values, for we could make each of these points about an instrumental means. Thus 1) if someone values a clean and attractive surroundings, he will take out the garbage; whereas 2) if he leaves it lying around, we would be entitled to doubt that he does value cleanliness and order. And 3) the more one experiences and enjoys a clean and attractive home, the more motivated he will be to keep it that way. In short, these are all points regarding the means-end relationship as such, and thus do not help us tell whether virtue is an instrumental or a constitutive means. Nor do they pose any challenge, as far as I can see, to Rand's view that among the conditions of flourishing, value is fundamental, virtue derivative.

## Conclusion

I have raised a number of questions and objections about both of the core claims in the paper: that happiness rather than life is the ultimate value and that virtue is a constitutive rather than an instrumental means to happiness. I suspect that the concept of flourishing is the key to many of those questions and objections, and that Badhwar could answer them by defining this concept in more depth. And it would help in dealing with the issues of virtue to clarify the instrumental-constitutive distinction—although I suspect that it simply cannot be given a clear meaning in regard to the relationships among virtue, flourishing, life, and happiness.

Pending these clarifications, however, it seems to me that Badhwar has not established her main theses. But this is not to deny the value of the many specific points she makes about virtue and happiness, which can enrich our understanding both of Rand's vision and of the developing Objectivist ethics.

## Notes:

1. These conceptual distinctions do not imply that survival, flourishing, and enjoyment are ontologically distinct and independent, only that we can distinguish them as aspects of a person's overall state of life. Cf. Tara Smith, *Viable Values* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), chapter 5. Smith's distinction between objective and subjective flourishing (137) corresponds to my distinction between flourishing and enjoyment.
2. Ayn Rand, "The Objectivist Ethics," in *The Virtue of Selfishness* (New York: New American Library, 1964), 16. Hereafter, VOS.
3. The obvious rationale for this point is that identity over time as the same entity requires the continuing presence of essential properties; otherwise we could say that an organism continues in existence as a collection of chemicals even after it dies. Rand never developed a metaphysical theory about identity over time, but the basic thesis here seems implicit in her viewpoint, and is enough for our purposes.
4. On production, see "The Objectivist Ethics" and "What is Capitalism" in *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* (New York: New American Library, 1967). On philosophy, see "Philosophy: Who Needs It?" in *Philosophy: Who Needs It* (New York: New American Library, 1984) and "Philosophy and Sense of Life" in *The Romantic Manifesto* second revised edition (New York: New American Library, 1975); on art, "Art and Sense of Life," "Art and Cognition" in *The Romantic Manifesto*; on freedom, "Man's Rights" in VOS.
5. Her argument is presented on pages 34-37, and summarized at 43.
6. In *Atlas Shrugged* (New York: Signet, 1957), 944; and "The Objectivist Ethics," in VOS 27.

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# Author's Response

## Living Long and Living Well: Reflections on Survival, Happiness, and Virtue

### A Reply to Friedenber, Hunt, and Kelley

Neera K. Badhwar

“The achievement of his own happiness is man’s highest moral purpose.”—Ayn Rand <sup>1</sup>

I am grateful to my commentators for the thought-provoking questions they have raised about several of my arguments in “Is Virtue Only A Means to Happiness?” and glad to have this opportunity to clarify and add to my arguments, as well as to consider issues that were tangential to my concerns there. David Kelley raises the greatest number of questions, so my response to him will be longer than my responses to Lester Hunt or Jay Friedenber.

Before I start, however, I should note that I will follow my earlier usage (and standard philosophical practice) in using “happiness” and “flourishing” interchangeably to refer to the supreme value, and not, as Kelley does, to refer to “enjoyment” and “existential success in pursuing and acquiring an array of values,” respectively. Since Rand also sometimes used “happiness” to refer to the supreme value, as the quote above shows, and since we can distinguish between these two aspects of happiness simply by using the words “success” and “enjoyment” or its cognates, this should not cause any confusion.

Kelley thinks I have not adequately defended my thesis that the supreme value is a long happy life rather than long-term survival, or my thesis that virtue is not a mere means to happiness but a constitutive part of it, i.e., part of its definition. He thinks that these claims are neither true in their own right, nor as an interpretation of Rand’s novels. I will start with some simple thought experiments to address the first objection.

## The Supreme Value: Mere Survival?

Consider the following scenarios.

### Scenario One

At the age of 56 you lose the business you have spent the better part of your life creating when your partner wipes you clean and flees to foreign lands, and you are left handicapped and bereft when a drunk driver crashes into your car killing your beloved and your two dearest friends. Then your only child slides into a depression—till she is rescued by The Spaceship Cult of the Immaculate One, never to be heard from again. You spend the next 20 years of your life learning to live with your disability and trying to find new meaning in life, but your best attempts are met with misfortune, which has taken an unusual liking to you. Your only consolation is that you did your best, but you are at the end of your tether. You try to commit suicide but fail. You often wish bitterly that you had died in that accident, and eagerly greet your death at 76 as a liberation from the life that had become a mill-stone around your neck.

### Scenario Two

At the age of 56 you are severely injured in an automobile accident, and after a few days you die, but not before you have had a mutual affirmation of love with your loved ones and put your business affairs in order with the help of your trustworthy partner. As you lie dying, you look back on your life with joy and pride and something like gratitude that you achieved practically all the goals that you—and most human beings—value in life: meaningful work, intimate friendship, romantic love, parenthood, and health. You mourn the fact that you cannot enjoy all this for another 20 years, but you realize that the life you have had has been blest with uncommon fortune.

Which scenario would you prefer for your own life? Like me and practically everyone else, I expect that you would prefer the second. Further, I suspect you would think that it was *obvious* that anyone who loved life would choose the second—despite the tragedy of an untimely death. Indeed, I suspect that even those who regard long-term survival as the ultimate value and the standard of all value would agree with this if they looked at the situation with pre-theoretical eyes. Yet from the standpoint of their theory, “survivalists” (as I call them in “Virtue”) would have to say that you and I (and they themselves if I am right about the pre-theoretical choice they would make) are irrational or somehow mistaken in preferring the second. For on the survivalist view, success in achieving one’s goals and enjoying one’s life gets its

value only from enabling you to live a long life, this being the primary goal, the ultimate value. Since you have this ultimate value in the first scenario, there is no reason to prefer the second, where you have only instrumental or derivative values. On the survivalist view, then, I suspect most people would turn out to be irrational in the most fundamental choice they can make.

Consider, again, a variation on the second scenario.

### Scenario Three

The accident occurs not when you are 56 but 76. As before, you have lived a wonderful life.

The choice between the three scenarios seems even clearer: this is the one we would all hope for for ourselves and those we love. But on what grounds could survivalists favor this choice over the first one? In both cases, you live equally long. If the supreme value is surviving for the normal life span (whatever that might be for your gender and time), you should toss a coin between the two scenarios.

The strangeness of this conclusion should be enough to give the survivalist pause about his theory, both in its own right, and as an interpretation of Rand's novels. As I pointed out in "Virtue," when parents wish well to their children, what they wish them is not just a *long* life, but a long and *happy* life, by which they mean at least a successful and enjoyable life, whatever else they might mean. It is also telling that there is no suggestion in Rand's novels that an unhappy but long life is just as satisfactory as a happy and long life—or, for that matter, that a long, unhappy life is better than a shorter but happy life. The survivalist should, then, admit that *quality* of life also has an inherent (non-instrumental) value, that success and enjoyment are valuable as ends, and not simply as a *means* to living a *long* life.

Why, then, does survivalism continue to be defended? Kelley gives the following argument, attributing it to Rand:

1. [I]n order to maintain its existence any organism must meet its needs by exercising its capacities for action.

2. For any species, they [its needs and capacities] imply a range of specific values to be sought as means to the ultimate end of survival, and a range of specific types of action by which to achieve those values.

3. The same general analysis applies to humans, but with a major difference in degree.... We have spiritual and social as well as material needs. We meet these needs through capacities for reason, self-awareness, and choice....

4. As a result, humans have a large and complex constellation of values that are rooted in one way or another, directly or indirectly, in the requirements of survival.

Premise 1 is undoubtedly true. But if Premise 2 states, as it seems to, that among animals and plants *all* values are sought as means to the ultimate end of their own survival, then it is certainly not true. Whereas animals of some species abandon—or even devour—their young for their own survival, it is well known that ani-

mals of many other species instinctively risk their own lives for the sake of their young.<sup>2</sup> The explanation lies in what is often called the “selfish gene theory,” the theory that the biological “goal” of the organism is to pass on its genes. Sometimes this requires that the organism look out for its own survival, sometimes that it risk its survival for the sake of its young, and sometimes that it risk its survival for the sake of its close kin or the group as a whole.<sup>3</sup>

For the same reason, Premise 3 is not true of humans, as a simple example suffices to show: the reproductive capacity. This capacity is not needed for our own survival, and so neither are sexual desire and pleasure, which serve the biological goal of reproduction. Nor is long-term survival Nature’s “goal” for us: as far as Nature is concerned, all we are meant to do is survive long enough to reproduce and raise our young till they are old enough to reproduce and raise their young till..... Thus, Kelley’s conclusion that all our values are “rooted in one way or another, directly or indirectly, in the requirements of [the individual’s own] survival” is not supported by the facts of biology.

Further, even those values that are *rooted* in the capacities needed for the individual’s own survival do not necessarily *serve* the individual’s survival. For example, the capacity to think enables us both to value our survival above all else (though not, typically, to the extent of devouring our young)—and to value something else (a person, an ideal) over our own survival. The faculties that enable us to love our lives more passionately than any animal also enable us to long for death when we are bereft of the values that we regard as making life worth living. The very plasticity of human nature that enables us to *choose* our values also enables us to choose values that are *antithetical* to survival. There is only one way to deny this conclusion, namely, to deny that any value—a beloved individual, an ideal—for which we might court death is a rational value. But the only non-question-begging way to defend this move is to show that valuing life only if it contains certain other values, is incoherent—internally contradictory. And this Kelley has not done (nor, as far as I can see, can it be done).

At the heart of Kelley’s argument there seems to be a subtle fallacy: an illicit move from “The requirements of survival give rise to certain values” to “All values serve (directly or indirectly) the requirements of survival.” A simple example will suffice to show the problem with this move. Thus from “The need to satisfy hunger and thirst gives rise to the value of food and drink” we cannot conclude (fortunately or unfortunately, as the case may be) that “All food and drink are valued to satisfy hunger and thirst”—much less that gourmet cooking or the Japanese tea ceremony are valued to satisfy these needs. Both examples commit the genetic fallacy of assuming that the *origin* (in this case, survival needs) of certain values must be the ultimate *goal* (survival) of those values.

If, then, some of our values are *autonomous*, i.e., independent of (though in principle compatible with) our survival needs—in particular, if some of our values are what make life worth living in the first place—then, when they are threatened, we may

be perfectly justified in choosing death over life. (“May,” because we may be mistaken about what makes life worth living—e.g., being chosen as the High School valedictorian may not count for much, whereas having the use of our eyes and limbs may.) That this is Rand’s own most deeply held view seems quite clear from her novels, from *We The Living* to *Anthem* to *Atlas Shrugged*, Kira, The Transgressor of the Unspeakable Word, The Unconquered, the Golden One, and John Galt all risk their lives for the sake of acquiring or preserving that which makes their lives worth living.

To summarize: long-term survival is neither our biological destiny, nor that which we *ought* to value most if we love our lives. For loving life means knowing what makes life worth living.

But what is the standard of value if it is not the requirements of survival? On what grounds can we say that being rejected as High School valedictorian is not (usually) a good enough reason for suicide whereas becoming a quadriplegic (often) is?<sup>4</sup> Even in this limited case, the right answer cannot be that being rejected as High School valedictorian is compatible with long-term survival, whereas becoming a quadriplegic is not. For in the present state of medical technology in the United States a quadriplegic with sufficient resources can survive. Yet if he chooses not to, his choice seems perfectly rational. What distinguishes the two cases is that being rejected as High School valedictorian typically has no bearing on the prospect of leading a successful, enjoyable life spent in the pursuit of rational values—whereas becoming a quadriplegic often does (not everyone can compensate for physical devastation by enhanced intellectual power, like Stephen Hawking). Rational values, then, as I suggested briefly in “Is Virtue Only A Means To Happiness?” can be understood as values that meet the following three conditions: (1) their pursuit or achievement is inherently enjoyable, (2) under normal circumstances it is *compatible* with, but not necessarily, even under normal circumstances, a *means* to, our survival (Section I, 8), and (3) they are compatible with a clear-sighted view of ourselves and of external reality (Section IV, 29–30 and V, 31).

In his comments, Kelley understandably omits my third necessary condition of rational values, since I bring it in only in later sections. But he also dismisses my second necessary condition (compatibility, under normal circumstances, with survival) as not doing much work, on the grounds that I don’t regard rational values (art, philosophy, friendship, et al.) as necessarily *means* to survival. He thus concludes that for me it is “their enjoyability that makes them values” (66).

I find this puzzling: there is a significant difference between a value being a *means* to survival and it being *compatible* with survival. Rejecting the first does not disqualify one from holding the second. The first sees survival as the *goal* of all rational values and actions, the second sees survival as a *constraint* on rational values and action. An analogy will help to make the distinction. We use logic to guide our inquiry into, say, the solar system, by distinguishing between valid and invalid argument forms. Logic thus serves as a constraint on our inquiry. But the goal of inquiry

remains knowledge of the solar system, and not logic itself. Analogously, the requirements of survival tell us which ways of living are compatible with survival, which not. But in choosing ways of living that are compatible with survival we do not commit ourselves to making survival the ultimate goal of all our values. Hence, someone who rejects survival as the ultimate goal of all rational values can still use compatibility with survival under normal circumstances as a constraint on rational values and, thus, on genuine happiness.

Kelley thinks that I cannot dismiss the idea that philosophy, art, et al. are means to survival without discussing the arguments given by Rand and others to support this claim. Let me then look at Rand's arguments for this claim with respect to philosophy. In "Philosophy: Who Needs It,"<sup>5</sup> she defines philosophy as an "integrated view of existence" (PWNI 5) which answers three fundamental questions, "Where am I? How do I know it? What should I do?" (PWNI 2). According to Rand, we have no choice about having a philosophy, only about how we acquire it (subconsciously and emotionally, or consciously and rationally), and whether what we acquire is rational or irrational (PWNI 5). "Most men," she states, "spend their days struggling to evade [the] three [philosophical] questions, the answers to which underlie man's every thought, feeling, and action" (PWNI 2). Most men thereby abdicate the task of acquiring a philosophy rationally, and allow themselves to be run by their emotions. Such men, says Rand, are weighed down with self-doubt, fear, and guilt, and find themselves at the mercy of their culture, which is mostly irrational thanks to the dominant philosophical trend of the last two hundred years (PWNI 2–6). Thus, most men have (mostly) irrational philosophies, and "are not very active, not very confident, not very happy" (PWNI 2). She reaches the same conclusion in "Philosophy and Sense of Life."<sup>6</sup>

This seems to me to be clearly an argument for the claim that a rational philosophy is important for *happiness*, not for *survival*. True, the story of the astronaut with which she starts "Philosophy: Who Needs It?" is meant to illustrate the latter claim. But the story's plausibility comes entirely from the fact that the astronaut gives the wrong answers to the three fundamental questions in a concrete situation where the right answers *are* crucial to his survival. It doesn't follow from this that the right answers are *always* crucial to one's survival (nor is it the case that the wrong answers at an abstract level always lead people to the wrong answers at a concrete level). If they were, then people with bad philosophies (which, according to Rand, includes most people) would fail to live out their natural life span. But this is not even true of the philosophers whose philosophies she regards, rightly or wrongly, as quintessentially bad, Hume and Kant.

It might be said that if people's bad philosophies don't kill them, it is only because they hesitate to draw or act on the anti-life conclusions their philosophies entail. But even if it is true that such an entailment relation exists between bad philosophy and life-threatening answers, what objection can a survivalist raise to the refusal to draw the logical conclusion? After all, being logical, on this view, is itself a

value only as a means to survival. Hence, when it doesn't serve survival, one *shouldn't* be logical.

Rand's arguments for the claim that art, et al. are necessary for survival are of the same order. But one doesn't have to look at Rand's arguments to reject this claim. Life offers numerous counterexamples. As I point out in "Virtue," people not only can, but many, many people do, survive perfectly securely and long without romantic love, meaningful careers, or art. They manage because enough of their physical and psychological needs are met to keep them reasonably healthy, sane, and desirous of life. Between being blessedly happy and miserable enough to be suicidal are many possibilities compatible with long-term survival.

That a bleak life can be a long life is true not only of human beings but also of animals and plants. The long-tailed weasel in the subalpine region of the Rocky Mountains is well-fed, sleek, and sweet-tempered. It leads, we might say, a full life *qua* weasel. By contrast, the life of the long-tailed weasel in the tundra region of the Rocky Mountains life is a miserable scramble for food, and the tundra weasel is a vicious little beast. Yet it ekes out its existence long enough to survive its natural lifespan, i.e., to reproduce and raise its young long enough that they can grow up to fend for themselves and reproduce and raise their young long enough.... It leads a mere life *qua* weasel. Similar is the contrast between the subalpine pine (tall, green, vigorous) and the tundra pine (stunted and twisted), which all the same manages to fulfill its biological destiny of living long enough to form seeds and reproduce.

In the face of these facts about humans and other species, I do not see how Kelley can defend his assertion that "[l]eading a full life is the only way to achieve mere life—securely and over the natural course of a lifespan" (63). Sometimes, however, Kelley defends a weaker thesis, but without distinguishing it from the thesis just quoted. Instead of saying that leading a full life—a life that contains philosophy, art, meaningful work etc.—is *necessary* for survival Kelley says that it "makes a significant difference to a person's prospects for long-term survival" (65). This is far more plausible—but still too strong. The most we can say is that a life-affirming philosophy, art, et al. often make a difference to a person's prospects for survival. Unfortunately, so does the desire to placate a powerful God who'll send you to hell if you don't live a healthy, pious life, or the solidarity of a religious group that offers you physical and psychological security at the cost of your autonomy. The Hutterites, who have existed as self-sufficient groups since the 16th C, and continue to flourish, are a good example of the latter point. Even simple fear of death can lead to long-term survival. But neither Rand nor Kelley would say that these values or attitudes are rational.

At yet other times, it seems that Kelley's thesis is not that rational values and virtues necessarily promote the survival of the individuals who have them, but that they promote the survival of *others*. For example, in response to my claim that the human species has multiplied wildly without any change in its moral state, Kelley states that the population explosion and the increase in longevity are due to scien-

tific, medical, and technological advances, “all of which are the result of human rationality and productiveness” (65). But the fact that millions more are being born and living longer all over the world doesn’t show that *they* are more productive or rational than people 200 years ago (or very productive or rational at all: the population explosion is occurring almost entirely among the poor and illiterate or ill-educated). All it shows is that millions can benefit (if the population explosion can be called a benefit) from the productivity of a relatively few. Nor does great productivity always signify great virtue. For one thing, not virtue but certain mental disorders have been the source of great productivity in literature, art, and even mathematics.<sup>7</sup> For another, some of the most productive people have been unjust, intolerant, disloyal, and cruel in their personal lives (sometimes as a result of the same mental disorder that has been the source of their productivity). Further, even to the extent that the disposition to produce involves virtue, the mere fact that modern industrialists and scientists are able to produce more goods than their pre-Industrial Revolution counterparts does not show that they are more virtuous; it simply shows that they benefit from the work of the many productive people who have gone before them. Add to this the fact that the last century was the bloodiest century in human history (so far), thanks to the prevalence of totalitarian regimes made possible by modern technology, and it seems indisputable that there has been no overall moral progress.

I have said enough to show that mere survival cannot be our ultimate value, and that at the very least success and enjoyment must be accepted as part of the ultimate value. And in one place Kelley does slip into accepting this, when he states that survival, success “in the enterprise of life” (thriving), and enjoyment “are essentially connected as aspects of a single ultimate value” (63–64).

Kelley is right that I have not said enough about how happiness can serve as a standard. But an adequate account of happiness and its sources requires a theory of human nature and, thus, a full-fledged discussion of a variety of philosophical and psychological issues. Such an account is the task of a book. My task in “Virtue” was the limited one of showing that Rand’s dominant conception of the ultimate value in her writings is happiness, not survival, to fashion a coherent conception of happiness out of her various statements about happiness, to give an analysis of virtue that, I argued, fits her protagonists better than her own analysis, and to show that in her novels she depicts virtue as part of the ultimate end of happiness. By way of defending these propositions, I also argued that survival is a non-starter both as the ultimate value and as a standard of value. This leaves happiness as the only game in town for an objective, egoistic ethics—whatever the right account of happiness.

Assuming, then, that happiness is the ultimate value, what is the relationship between happiness and virtue? The answer to this question is part of the process of filling out an account of happiness. If the answer is that virtue is a purely instrumental means to happiness, then happiness cannot be more than a long, existentially successful and enjoyable life. From this it follows that it is logically possible to be happy without being virtuous (just as on the survivalist view, it is logically possible to

survive without being virtuous). In contrast to this instrumentalist view is the view I defended, namely, that virtue is both a means to, and partly constitutive of, happiness.<sup>8</sup> On this view, it is not logically possible to be happy without being virtuous. Virtue is part of the definition of a happy life. Which of these views best fits the facts of human psychology, as shown in the ideals most of us aspire to or that Rand depicts in her novels? Once again, I will start with some thought experiments.

## Virtue: A Mere Means to Happiness?

Consider the following scenarios.

### Scenario Four

You die at the age of 76, surrounded by loving friends and family. But you have often been a cause of despair to these very friends and family. Easily attracted to new pleasures, you yourself have been undependable as a lover, parent, and friend, often unavailable emotionally or practically when most needed. What you have had going for you is the infectious spirit of a carefree, lovable, though often thoughtless, child, the ability to hold people spellbound with your skills as a raconteur, and a sense of adventure that leads you to take risks that would daunt more timid souls—as well as frequently leading you into trouble. But in times of trouble you have always been rescued by your loyal friends and family. You have been grateful for their love and loyalty, and remorseful when you realized that you were hurting them. But most of the time you have failed to realize this, and even when you have, your naturally buoyant spirits and ability to enjoy a variety of experiences and people have quickly reasserted themselves. What you have had going for you is an irrepressible charm that unfailingly evokes love.

As in Scenario Three, so in this one, you live a full span of years, successfully and enjoyably. Of course, your success is largely due to the fact that the infectious charm that nature has bestowed on you leads others to pick up the slack, rather than your own responsible, rational behavior, behavior designed to lead to material and spiritual success.

If you care about being a rational, responsible, mature adult, would you choose Scenario Three or Four for yourself? Undoubtedly, three. But if rationality and morality are only instrumental means to the supreme value of long-term, successful, enjoyable, survival, then why should you care that you achieved this value without being a (very) rational, moral adult? Someone who finds smoking and a diet heavy in fat and empty calories pleasurable, and exercise and a well-balanced diet aversive, has no reason to regret her life-style if she has inherited the genetic luck of her ancestors and lived a long, fit, and healthy life. Similarly, someone who has lived a

full and enjoyable life without (much) rationality or morality has no reason to regret the lack.

One response that the instrumentalist might make to this example is simply to deny the possibility of an (often) irresponsible, irrational, but lovable and successful individual who enjoys life. But on what grounds? The character I have drawn is easily recognizable in real life and in fiction—indeed, in fiction from around the world. Further, as our knowledge of the immense variability in human psychology increases, we can understand how the confluence of certain appealing traits and fortunate circumstances can lead to success despite a lack of rationality, productiveness, and independence, just as we can understand how genetic luck can lead to physical health and longevity despite the lack of a healthy life-style. But even if my example of the happy-go-lucky successful individual is unacceptable to the Objectivist instrumentalist, there are other well-known real-life examples that challenge instrumentalism.

Consider, then, individuals like Socrates or Jefferson, who led long, successful, enjoyable lives, but were at the same time blind to the egregious injustice of slavery (Socrates), or worse, themselves perpetrators of this injustice (Jefferson). Socrates protested against many injustices of his time, not only in words but also in action. Yet he seems not to have noticed—or cared sufficiently about—the injustice of slavery. Jefferson had pangs of guilt, maybe even long periods of guilt, over his ownership of slaves, but his guilt obviously did not disturb him enough to free his slaves. No doubt he also engaged in a great deal of rationalization to justify his injustice (“the slaves are better off as my slaves than as free men” etc.), and no doubt evasion is psychologically costly. But presumably, his enjoyment of his luxurious lifestyle, for which he needed (or at any rate thought he needed) his slaves, outweighed these psychic costs.

If you care about seeing things as they are and doing the right thing, then you must wish that if you had been in Socrates’ place, you would have spoken out against slavery, and that had you been in Jefferson’s place, you would have freed your slaves. But how can the instrumentalist justify having such a wish? How can he justify the proposition that Socrates would have been better off if he had not been blind, or Jefferson better off if he had freed his slaves? True, Jefferson would then not have suffered guilt or the costs of evasion, but he would also not have enjoyed the same luxuries of life. On a cost-benefit analysis of success in his projects and enjoyment of this success minus the psychic pain of injustice and evasion, he was probably better off hanging on to his slaves. At any rate, on the basis of the evidence available to him and his goals, interests, and resources, he had good reason to believe that he was better off. And so in terms of the supreme value of leading a long, successful, enjoyable life, he did the instrumentally rational thing.

The instrumentalist might argue that a high degree of perceptiveness and justice are *generally* necessary for leading a successful and enjoyable life, and that the only way to cultivate and maintain them reliably is to act on them consistently in

every situation, even if doing so is contrary to our goals in those situations. Thus, the rational thing for Socrates and Jefferson to have done was to be perceptive or just, respectively.

The principle defended here may be true, but it is doubly beside the point. For one thing, we have good reason to believe that Socrates' blind spot was not the result of lack of effort at perceptiveness, but an instance of a common human failing (blindness to widespread injustices that we are born to and that no one around us questions). For another, even if the problem was not unwitting blindness but, rather, lack of sufficient concern about slavery, there is no evidence that it detracted from his highly successful and enjoyable life, which he spent in the activity he most loved: philosophical investigation. Indeed, if beneficial influence on others is a measure of success as a philosopher, then he may well be one of the most successful philosophers in history. So even if he had good reason to act on his recognition of the injustice of slavery, he had no reason from the instrumentalist point of view to retrospectively regret his failure to be rational or just. Similarly, Jefferson also led a highly successful, enjoyable life despite his injustice, and to some extent because of his injustice. And so even if he had good reason to act justly, he had no reason in retrospect to regret his failure of justice or rationality. Socrates and Jefferson would have reason to regret their failures of perceptiveness or rationality or justice only if they thought that these qualities had non-instrumental value, that being a perceptive, rational, or just person was itself part of what it meant to achieve the highest good. In short, they would have reason to regret their failures—and we would have reason to be and act differently from them if we were in their place—only if virtue is partly constitutive of a flourishing life.

In any case, the claim that the only way to be sure that one will act virtuously where it pays off is to act virtuously across the board, even when we don't expect it to pay off, is dubious. Someone who is reliably just as a colleague may be quite unjust as a mother, and be aware of it (she simply has no talent or patience with children). Likewise, someone who is a kind husband may be an unkind son (he's never understood or been fond of his father), and someone who is generous with time may be stingy with money (he's never shaken off his neurotic fear of poverty). Indeed, their shame at their various failures may make them even more keen on cultivating their virtues in areas where they find it easier to be virtuous. This compartmentalization of virtue seems as common as the compartmentalization of intellectual and artistic abilities.<sup>9</sup> For instance, a good physicist need not be a good zoologist, nor a good painter a good sculptor. But if it is true that virtue can be compartmentalized, it follows that it is irrational for the instrumentalist to prescribe virtuous action even in situations—or types of situations—where the agent knows (or with good reason expects) it to be contrary to his prospects for success. So if the only reason to be just across the board is to maximize our chances of success, as instrumentalists believe, but Jefferson had good reason to believe that being just to his slaves and freeing them would have the opposite effect, then he had good reason not to be just towards them.

Once again, the strangeness of this conclusion should be enough to give the instrumentalist pause about his theory, both in its own right, and as an interpretation of Rand's novels. For once again, if this is Rand's view, then how can one explain why she so often shows her heroes renouncing the prospect of success (Howard Roark), even survival (John Galt), and courting pain, for the sake of maintaining their integrity and independence, but nowhere shows them compromising (much less renouncing) their integrity or independence for the sake of survival or success and enjoyment? Even if it were true, contrary to my arguments above, that compromising the means is always likely to lead to failure in the long run, isn't renouncing the prospect of success now and in the long run even *more* likely to lead to failure? On the instrumentalist interpretation of what counts as the highest good, and how virtue is related to it, Rand's heroes are simply irrational, renouncing the prospect of the supreme value for the sake of a mere means (virtue), but stubbornly refusing to compromise the mere means for the sake of the supreme value.

## Does Morality Rest On A Fundamental Choice? Can One Opt Out of Morality?

Kelley raises the following meta-ethical question about my view that happiness is the ultimate value.

Suppose that someone chooses fame rather than happiness [as his ultimate value].... How are we to think of him? Is he immoral for having chosen the wrong fundamental value? Or are his actions beyond moral appraisal because he has opted out of the foundation of morality? (66)

I reject the idea that morality is based on a fundamental choice, whether we take the ultimate value to be happiness or survival. Hence I do not believe that one can opt out of morality by choosing unhappiness or death, either immediately or in the long run. On the survivalist view, if one chooses death, then nothing one might do before dying (or perhaps nothing one might do that is consistent with the goal of death) is open to moral evaluation.

But this view runs into several problems. First, as I point out in "Virtue," the question of whether to live or die doesn't arise for most people, hence most people never even contemplate making such a choice. In that sense, most of us live by default. Second, the choice to live or die is itself subject to moral evaluation, since either choice can be either a cowardly escape from responsibility—or an act of heroism. Thirdly, even if someone chooses to die, it doesn't follow that he may do whatever he likes with moral impunity. For example, if he decides to assault someone in the hope that the other will kill him in self-defense—or to commit mass murder before committing suicide—his actions are unjust. For other people's rights cannot be de-

pendent on *his* decision to live or die.

Similar considerations apply to the choice of unhappiness or fame over happiness. Unlike death, which people do sometimes deliberately choose, people never deliberately choose unhappiness, even if their choices often lead to unhappiness. Similarly, if they choose fame, it is probably because they tell themselves that they will be unhappy if they don't achieve fame. At any rate, whatever they choose, their choice is subject to moral evaluation, as are all their other choices.

More generally, as long as we are capable of making the distinction between right and wrong, our actions are subject to moral evaluation, regardless of our choice of ultimate value. Morality is based on our nature as beings who can choose their ends in light of the concepts of right and wrong, regardless of our conception of right and wrong and of the ends we actually choose. The only people who are exempt from moral evaluation are those who are incapable of making the distinction between right and wrong, or of acting on that distinction (psychopaths and people with certain sorts of mental handicaps).

## Virtue and Value

Kelley questions my view that the cardinal virtues (rationality, productivity, and pride) are partly constitutive of the cardinal values (reason, purposefulness, and self-esteem), in the sense that they are part of the definition of these values. He argues that rationality is a means to reason, which is "something like one's faculty of thought and/or the conceptual awareness of reality that results from using it" (69). Just as an individual aims to achieve a clean house by cleaning his house, Kelley says, so he aims to keep or reach reason by acting rationally, i.e., using his reason.

I don't really see how the virtue of rationality can be a means to the faculty of thought, since the virtue of rationality presupposes the faculty, and one doesn't lose the faculty by lacking this virtue. So I will take Kelley to mean that it is a means to conceptual awareness of reality or, more simply, knowledge. However, there is no disagreement between us here: I agree that rationality is a means to knowledge. Like the other virtues, rationality aims at certain states of affairs to which it is a means. What I maintain is that someone who values knowledge (reason) wholeheartedly will necessarily, i.e., by definition, have the virtue of rationality. Rationality is not simply "using reason," as Kelley states, since one can use it well or badly, or use it without enjoying doing so. The virtue of rationality is *loving* reason, so that one's thoughts, feelings, and actions are informed by this love. My argument takes the following form:

1. A virtue is a deep-seated disposition to think, feel, and act in a way that expresses or aims at certain values, a disposition one takes pleasure in expressing in action.
2. Rationality is the virtue of valuing reason by thinking, feeling, and acting according to reason, and deriving pleasure from doing so.
3. Hence, if someone lacks the virtue of rationality, then he fails to (fully)

value reason.

In other words, valuing reason entails being rational (and being rational entails valuing reason). Being rational is part of the definition of valuing reason (and valuing reason is part of the definition of rationality). To understand the claim, it is important to keep in mind that moral goodness comes in different degrees, and that virtue is moral excellence. Similarly, we value things in different degrees, and internalizing the value of something, i.e., having its value inform one's thoughts, feelings, and actions, is valuing it to the highest degree possible. Thus, if we fully value reason, its value will inform one's thoughts, feelings, and actions. But this just *is* the virtue of rationality. It is in this sense that rationality defines what it means to value reason, and cannot be a means to reason.

Kelley's argument against my claim that the value of reason is partly defined by the virtue of rationality is based on the assumption that by "the value of reason" I mean something like truth or knowledge. Perhaps with my clarification here, our disagreement is dissolved. At any rate, if Kelley still disagrees with me, he needs to say what it means to fully value reason, if it does not entail having the virtue of rationality, and what the virtue of rationality is, if it does not entail fully valuing reason.

Kelley remarks that the distinction between reason as a value (truth) and rationality as a virtue ("the action of using reason") "is not affected by enriching the conception of virtue-as-action" (69). It is true that *this* distinction is not affected. But the richer notion of virtue brings into focus the distinction between fully valuing something and simply valuing it enough to aim at it, and thus shows how valuing reason can be both the means to, and "the realization of," one's ultimate value (VOS, 27).

A similar analysis applies to the other cardinal virtues and values. If you fully value having a sense of purpose, you will have the virtue of productivity, and if you fully value having self-esteem, you will have the virtue of pride. Productivity expresses the value one places on living a purposeful life, and is a means to certain material, intellectual, or artistic values. Pride expresses the value one places on having self-esteem (i.e., a sense of oneself as worthy and capable of happiness), and is a means to maintaining a virtuous character and, thus, one's self-esteem.

## Emotions and Cognition

Lester Hunt focuses on my discussion of Rand's view that "emotions are not tools of cognition" (VOS, 29). He thinks that I am rejecting this claim because emotions are no more likely to be mistaken than beliefs and reasoning. However, this runs together two different parts of my discussion. Since Rand makes it clear that she sees emotions as "lightning calculators giving ....[us] the sum of ....[our] profit or loss" (VOS, 27), I believe that she *does* see emotions as tools of cognition, but as tools that are always secondary to the intellect, in the following two senses.

## 1. The Computer-Programmer Metaphor

According to Rand, our emotional faculty is like a computer which must be programmed by the intellect, the intellect being responsible for choosing the values that our emotions express (VOS, 28). My view is that although this is true of most adult emotions, it is not true as an account of the way our values or our intellectual or emotional capacities develop, and that the intellect itself would be inert—unable to choose values—without the help of pre-conceptual emotions that enable us to make *value-responses* long before we are able to make *value-judgments* (22–5).

## 2. The Intellect As Trumps

Rand often suggests that in a conflict between one's emotions and one's intellectual judgement, one must always trust the latter (24). It is here that I point out that beliefs can be mistaken and reasoning off-track just as easily as emotions. But my argument for sometimes trusting one's emotions over one's intellectual judgment does not assume, as Hunt thinks, that the issue "could be settled by seeing whether the emotions that people in general experience are more frequently wrong than the reasoning that they do." My argument has to do with the structure of the emotions. On Rand's own view, the emotions embody a vast amount of evaluative information made by past intellectual judgments. Given this, it is perfectly possible that these past judgments are true and the present judgment that the emotions contradict false. Further, I make it clear that whether one should rely on one's emotions in a particular situation or on one's intellectual judgement depends on the general reliability of one's emotions vis-a-vis one's intellect in that sort of situation. Some people's emotions are more reliable than others', and everyone's emotions are more reliable in some situations than in others. Knowing when to rely on one's emotions, and when to discount them, requires self-knowledge, and this is itself the product of intellectual and emotional discernment.<sup>10</sup>

Hunt himself goes on to make these points as implications of Rand's view, but he makes them apparently without realizing that we are in agreement here. Hunt recognizes later in his comments that my major objection is to Rand's view of the relationship between intellect and emotion. But once again, he does not address the point I am objecting to when I say that Rand's picture of moral development is unidirectional, namely, that on her picture it is the untouched intellect that chooses values and then programs the emotions. And so he also does not address my argument against this view of moral development, or explain how Rand's computer-programmer metaphor can be compatible with any other interpretation.

Hunt states that Rand's stated doctrines and her novels are consistent with each other in implying that the emotions play a secondary role in knowledge. The emotions direct our attention to certain features of our landscape, thus "setting problems to be solved rather than the solutions to be arrived at" (58). The solutions themselves must be arrived at with the help of evidence "in the form of well-grounded

beliefs” and an explanatory story or argument (57). I agree that this is the view implicit in Rand’s stated doctrines, but I give examples from her novels that show a contrary and more radical view. These examples show emotions themselves providing a justified basis for belief and action even when the individual in question is unable to justify her feelings or beliefs or actions intellectually (24–5). Here it is the *intellect* that is playing a secondary role, and the emotions that are trumps. What the examples show is precisely that well-grounded beliefs are, sometimes, beliefs that are grounded in our emotions. If we had to analyze and justify all our emotions intellectually before acting on them, we would often not act at all, and our emotions could not play the role they do in knowledge and action. In “Virtue” I also provide evidence to show that the inability to have (certain) emotions robs a person of the ability to engage in certain kinds of reasoning.

Hunt believes that Rand’s view of the emotions as always secondary to the intellect is both consistent with her novels, and correct in its own right. But his argument for this is simply that no emotion by itself constitutes sufficient or “overwhelming evidence” that things are the way they seem to be (56). This is true, but the same applies to beliefs based on perception or argument. It is only a wide network of observational data, argument, and theory that can provide “overwhelming evidence” for the veridicality of an intellectual judgment—or an emotion. But often one must act on less than overwhelming evidence. And sometimes, when intellectual judgment and emotions conflict, one may be justified in giving more credence to the latter.

## The Is and the Ought: Biology, Psychology, and Ethics

Jay Friedenberg provides a wealth of interesting data from the psychological and biological literature on various topics relevant to my concerns in “Virtue”. The main issue I would like to address here is the limits and uses of these sciences in constructing or testing an ethical theory.

First, though, I will clarify some misunderstandings of my terminology, theses, and arguments. I do not claim to find only one view of the highest value in Rand, as Friedenberg states; I claim that her most commonly stated view is that survival is the highest value, whereas her novels present happiness as the highest value. And in her novels happiness is presented not simply as an emotional state, but as a certain kind of life and attitude. But even if one conceives of it as simply an emotional state, it does not follow that it cannot be a value, as Friedenberg states (40). Any goal can be a value, and happiness can certainly be a goal. It is also misleading to say that I claim that happiness has little to do with survival. Rather, I say that it is not *necessary* for survival, although great unhappiness can certainly lead to the desire for death. What is important to remember here is that there are degrees of happiness and unhappiness, as there are degrees of health and fitness, and that the highest value is complete happiness, not simply the absence of unhappiness.

Friedenberg correctly points out that, according to evolutionary theory, the survival of the individual is not the ultimate value.<sup>11</sup> But he still concludes, without

further argument, that evolutionary theory supports Rand's view of the individual's survival as the ultimate value for that individual (40–1). I do not understand how he arrives at this conclusion. Indeed, even if evolutionary theory told us that it is the individual's own survival that is the ultimate value, it would not support Rand's view. For Nature's purposes need not be ours. Thus, nature's purpose in endowing us with sexual desire is reproduction, but in our attempt to satisfy this desire, we usually do our best to thwart nature's purpose. If Rand's view had been that we ought to choose survival because this is Nature's goal for us, she would have committed the naturalistic fallacy. But she avoids this fallacy by starting with a hypothetical premise, and making the choice of survival over non-survival a basic, pre-moral choice: "*If you want to survive, then you must be moral.*"

Again, the fact that there are two brain systems which interact in guiding action cannot by itself tell us how we ought to conceive of virtue, i.e., entirely as an intellectual capacity, or as both an intellectual and an emotional capacity (46–7). How we ought to conceive of virtue has to do with ideas of excellence, reliability, freedom, and so on. Thus, according to Kant, virtue must be purely rational, because emotions are neither reliable nor free, whereas reason is both.

At the same time, however, biology and psychology can help to correct or confirm the factual assumptions often implicitly or explicitly made by ethical theory. For example, the biological evidence for the interaction between the limbic brain and the cortex serves as a corrective to Kant's view of ethical reasoning as completely independent of emotion and confirms the view that (most) emotions have intellectual components. Again, the psychological evidence for the importance of emotion in reasoning and action confirms the view that an adequate conception of virtue must include both intellectual and emotional components. The selfish gene theory is also important in explaining the capacity for both other-regarding and self-regarding motivation and behavior, thus falsifying the common view that all motivation is fundamentally self-regarding. Further, biology and psychology can help us understand why the free expression of non-self-sacrificial, but genuinely other-regarding, motives is an important part of psychological health and of happiness, a view that is central to egoistic theories like Aristotle's and (I believe) to the implicit theory in Rand's novels.

## Notes:

1. Ayn Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness* (New York: Signet, 1961), 27/30 (hereafter: VOS). Primary citations are to the hardback edition. Paperback citations are included secondarily in some cases.
2. For example, birds abandon their young in times of food shortage, whereas salmon die in the attempt to spawn. See Matt Ridley, *The Origins of Virtue: Human Instincts and the Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 17–20).
3. This theory was first propounded by George Williams and William Hamilton in the mid-60s, but popularized by Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1976). In his comments, Friedenbergl also points out that the biological goal of an organism is not its own survival, but mistakenly assumes that it is, instead, the survival of the species.
4. I say “usually” because particular circumstances can always make a difference to one’s case.
5. “Philosophy: Who Needs It,” *Philosophy: Who Needs It* (New York: New American Library, 1982), 1–11, hereafter PWNl.
6. “Philosophy and Sense of Life,” *The Romantic Manifesto* (New York: World Publishing Co., 1969), 31–41.
7. See Kay R. Jamison, *Touched with Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament* (New York: Free Press, 1993). Highly productive people have also often lived shorter-than-normal lives, sometimes as a result of burn out, sometimes of mental illness.
8. Instrumentalism can take either egoistic or utilitarian forms. Someone who believes that the individual’s highest moral purpose is to aim at the survival, or the survival, success, and enjoyment, of the greatest number is a utilitarian. But since the debate here is about what counts as an individual’s own highest good, rather than about whether he should aim at his own highest good or that of the greatest number, I will use “instrumentalism” to mean “egoistic instrumentalism”.
9. I argue for this in “The Limited Unity of Virtue,” *Nous*, Vol. 30, No. 3, Sept. 1996, 306–329.
10. Successful reasoning, as I argue in “Virtue,” requires emotion; purely intellectual reasoning cannot give self-knowledge. But even if it could, as Kelley implies in his comments (68), this is quite compatible with the fact that emotions can, justifiably, trump intellectual judgment.
11. His statement that the ultimate value is the survival of the species is, however, rejected by (most) biologists.

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## Commentator Biographies

**Jay Friedenber**g received a Ph.D. in Cognitive Psychology from the University of Virginia in 1995. He is currently Associate Professor of Psychology at Manhattan College where he teaches course in Research Methods, Learning and Cognition, Sensation and Perception, and Physiological Psychology. Dr. Friedenber's research interests are in visual perception, and he has published several articles on symmetry detection and facial attractiveness. He was inducted into the Phi Beta Kappa, Psi Chi, and Sigma Xi honor societies and is a member of the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology and the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

**Lester H. Hunt** is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is the author of *Nietzsche and the Origin of Virtue* (Routledge) and *Character and Culture* (Rowman and Littlefield), as well as a number of articles on ethics, political philosophy, philosophy of law, and philosophical psychology. He is currently at work on a book on the ways in which literature can contribute to philosophical discussion.

**David Kelley** is a nationally-known philosopher, teacher, and writer, who earned his Ph.D. in philosophy from Princeton University in 1975. He has since taught philosophy, cognitive sciences, and other courses at Vassar College and Brandeis University. His books include *Unrugged Individualism*, *The Art of Reasoning*, *A Life of One's Own: Individual Rights and the Welfare State*, and *The Contested Legacy of Ayn Rand*. Dr. Kelley is the founder and executive director of The Atlas Society in Washington, DC.

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