

Ayn Rand's Notion of Political Harmony

by

Dennis Orval Rice

A thesis  
presented to the University of Manitoba  
in fulfillment of the  
thesis requirement for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
in  
Political Studies

Winnipeg, Manitoba

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ISBN 0-315-47911-6

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BY

DENNIS ORVAL RICE

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of  
the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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Dennis Orval Rice



## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to analyse Ayn Rand's contention that conflicts among rational men are impossible, and that as a result, it is possible to build a harmonious political and economic system.

The procedure of the thesis will be to examine in detail all parts of Rand's philosophy, first her metaphysics, then her epistemology, then her ethics, and finally her political and economic theory, in order to see the basis for her belief in the possibility of a rational political and economic system.

The examination results in the discovery that Ayn Rand is an advocate of the primacy of existence, that she upholds reason as man's only means of knowledge, that she supports an ethics based on rational self-interest. On these bases she advocates radical, laissez-faire capitalism. Only under such a system, she holds, can rational men truly exist and therefore live without conflict.

The thesis concludes that Rand's case for a rational political system is basically valid. The thesis finds that Rand, as a defender of capitalism and the free market, makes a great contribution to thought on the subject.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, Professor George Knysh, for his assistance and helpful suggestions in preparing this thesis. I would also like to thank Professors Neilson and Peterson for consenting to be my examiners. Most of all, I wish to thank Trevor Wiebe for the assistance he gave me in suggesting some possible topics for discussion that I might otherwise have overlooked. Lastly, I wish to thank Dr. Leonard Peikoff for his excellent lecture series on Ayn Rand's philosophy.

FOOTNOTES

The following works by Ayn Rand, for purposes of space-economy, have been abbreviated in the footnotes of this thesis as follows:

- Atlas Shrugged.....AS.
- Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal.....C:TUI.
- For The New Intellectual.....FTNI.
- The Fountainhead.....TF.
- Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology..ITOE.
- The New Left: The Anti-Industrial Revolution....TNL.
- Philosophy: Who Needs It.....P:WNI.
- The Romantic Manifesto.....TRM.
- The Virtue of Selfishness.....VOS.

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## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis (discussing the thought of Ayn Rand and her philosophy, Objectivism,) is to answer the following question: Can relations among men ever be basically harmonious and conducive to individual happiness, or is it the case that man is the product of an essentially malevolent universe, and as such relations among men cannot fail but to be conflicting and unhappy?

One may rephrase this question in a more political light: Is it possible, through philosophical inquiry, to discover a political order that is harmonious and that serves individual happiness? Or is it the case that, given the supposedly conflicting nature of man and his universe, all political orders must necessarily be dominated by hostility and unhappiness?

The response of Ayn Rand to these questions can be summed up in the following statement: "There are no conflicts of interests among rational men."<sup>1</sup> This thesis will attempt to show how Ayn Rand arrives at her view that man's nature, his world, and his relations with others can be rational and harmonious.

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<sup>1</sup> VOS, p. 50.

The second chapter of the thesis will consist of a short biographical sketch of Ayn Rand, in order to familiarize the reader with her background, and a short study of the philosophical movement that she founded: Objectivism.

In its third chapter, the thesis will examine Objectivist metaphysics, or the question of how Ayn Rand views existence. Rand's metaphysics stands at the very base of her benevolent universe view. In it, she contends that reality is non-contradictory in nature, and that man is aware of it.

The fourth chapter of the thesis will examine Rand's epistemology, or her view of the means by which man acquires knowledge. In epistemology, Rand endorses the view that man obtains knowledge by a process of reason, taking his senses and cognitive tools as valid, and integrates his mind and body, as well as his logic and his emotions. This leads Rand to believe that man's own nature is conducive to harmony, and that man can settle his internal disputes objectively.

Chapter five looks at Rand's ethics, or her view of which moral code man requires for his survival and why. In short, Rand upholds the idea that man is to hold his own life as his standard of value, neither sacrificing himself to others nor expecting others to do this for him. He interacts with others only on the basis of mutual, uncoerced agreement. By these means, Rand contends, man's relations with others need not be governed by conflict.

In its sixth chapter, the thesis will probe the Objectivist viewpoint as to what kind of political order is necessary for there to be an absence of conflict in human relations. Consequently, Rand's views on the need for government and its proper functions will be examined. In total, Rand makes a case for a social system characterized by limited, constitutional government and a laissez-faire capitalist economic system. It is only through this system and through no other, Rand believes, that a harmonious political and economic order can be established. It is only under this system, she contends, that man can reach his highest potential.

Chapter seven will look at Rand's view of history and especially her views on the American political and economic system, aspects of which she has often praised.

Finally, chapter eight will look at some of Ayn Rand's critics and some of their viewpoints on her and her work, as well as some possible responses by Rand. Since the criticisms raised address many of the issues examined in this thesis, it would be worthwhile to explore them.

In conclusion, the thesis will decide whether Ayn Rand's case for a rational political order is viable and appropriate to today's political realities.

## Chapter II

### BIOGRAPHY

Ayn Rand was born Alice Rosenbaum, in St. Petersburg, Russia, on February 2, 1905. She grew up in a business family, the daughter of a pharmacist, and she and her family were quite prosperous until the coming of the Russian revolution. When that event occurred, the Rosenbaums found their business nationalized, and their wealth turned into abject poverty. Nevertheless, Alice, determined to become a writer of fiction, managed to attend university, studying philosophy and history, discovering Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. She would claim, perhaps not altogether accurately, that these two thinkers were the only significant influences on her thought. In her drive to be a writer, she became absorbed in the novels of classical greats like Victor Hugo. Together, these factors made Alice Rosenbaum decide that one of the best ways to spread her ideas was to use the fiction novel as a vehicle for explicit philosophizing. By this, she hoped to make her ideas at once scholarly, and yet acceptable to the general public.

In 1926, young Alice, disgusted with life under communism, set out for the United States, the country which, she felt, was the metaphysical embodiment of so many of her



philosophical premises. Here she lived briefly with relatives in Chicago before setting out for Hollywood to see if she could become a part of the American movies that she had enjoyed so much in Russia. Around this time, Alice changed her name to Ayn Rand; Ayn taken from the name of a Finnish writer and Rand taken from the name of her typewriter, a Remington Rand. In Hollywood, quite by coincidence, she met director Cecil B. DeMille, who, after coming to know Ayn, gave her a job as a movie extra. Within a short time, she met Frank O'Connor, another extra, who was later to become her husband.<sup>2</sup>

When DeMille's studio closed, Rand took on various jobs to support herself, but always kept in mind that these jobs were only a means to acquire the capital she would need to allow herself the time to work on the novels she was planning. In 1929 she and Frank O'Connor were married. In 1930, she began work on her first novel, We The Living, a story of life in Soviet Russia. At this time she also sold a play, Woman on Trial, later known as The Night of January 16th. In 1934, the O'Connors moved to New York, where Ayn Rand began work as a screenplay editor, and in 1936 We The Living was finally sold. Almost immediately, Rand began work on her second novel, The Fountainhead, which features architect Howard Roarke as her epitome of the ideal, rational man. During this time, Rand also wrote Anthem, an abstract story

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<sup>2</sup> Barbara Branden, The Passion of Ayn Rand, (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1986), pp. 52-79.

of life under totalitarian rule. In 1943 The Fountainhead, after numerous rejections, was at last published. It soon became and still is widely read.<sup>3</sup>

No sooner had this novel been published than Rand set to work on a screenplay for it. The movie was released in 1949, by which time the O'Connors had moved back to California. At last, after so many years of painful struggle, Ayn Rand had achieved spiritual and material success. Still, Rand did not rest. Instead, she began work on Atlas Shrugged, which was to be a full statement of her philosophy in novel form.

It was at this time, in 1950, that Ayn Rand received a letter from a young psychology student at UCLA, Nathaniel Blumenthal, formerly of Toronto. So impressed was Rand with his letter that she invited Nathaniel for a visit; they began a strong relationship that was to last nearly twenty years. Later, Nathaniel would change his surname to Branden, a rearrangement of "ben Rand" (son of Rand). Shortly thereafter, Nathaniel's good friend Barbara Weidman, would also become a close associate of Rand. In time, so did Barbara's cousin, Leonard Peikoff. Both were formerly of Winnipeg, and had attended the University of Manitoba for a time.

In 1951, Nathaniel and Barbara left California to study in New York, and soon Ayn Rand and Frank O'Connor left for New York as well, as Ayn had come to long for the city that she loved so much. In 1953, Nathaniel and Barbara were mar-

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 172-173.

ried. Rand's circle of youthful admirers continued to grow, and soon this group was meeting regularly at Rand's apartment to discuss her philosophy. In March 1957, Rand finished Atlas Shrugged and soon afterward it was published. After a slow start, sales of the book soared, and, like Rand's other novels, it continues to sell well even today.<sup>4</sup> After Atlas Shrugged, Rand's fiction-writing career came to an end. She apparently developed a case of fiction-writer's block, and although she did start on a new fiction novel, she was never able to finish it.

In 1958, Nathaniel Branden established, with Rand's guidance, the Nathaniel Branden Institute, which offered university-style lectures on Rand's philosophy. In a short time, the programs proved so popular that they were put on audio-tape, and were soon being listened to by admirers of Rand all over North America. At this time, The Objectivist Newsletter began publication, for which Rand and her associates wrote articles discussing various topical issues. This was one of Rand's first ventures into non-fiction. In 1966, this newsletter became The Objectivist. In 1961, Rand had written For The New Intellectual, and from 1964 to 1966, she wrote a flurry of non-fiction articles, which were compiled into several books: The Virtue of Selfishness, (1961) Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal, (1967) Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology, (1979) The Romantic Manifesto, (1971) and The New Left: The Anti-Industrial Revolution (1971). Pub-

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 133-290.

lished posthumously were: Philosophy: Who Needs It, (1982), and The Early Ayn Rand, (1984).<sup>5</sup> By 1968, Rand's relationship with the Brandens came to a bitter end, so that many of the activities which the Brandens had formerly managed for the Objectivist movement came to a halt as well.<sup>6</sup> Nathaniel Branden left to pursue a career in psychotherapy, while Barbara became a writer. Even so, Rand continued writing in The Ayn Rand Letter, and gave many speeches over the years. In 1974, she developed lung cancer. In 1979, Frank O'Connor died and in March 1982 so did Ayn Rand. Leonard Peikoff was left as her heir and assumed leadership of Rand's Objectivist movement.

But Rand's ideas and her influence did not die with her. Peikoff and a number of Rand's other associates began The Objectivist Forum, and later The Intellectual Activist, publications which relate Rand's ideas to topical issues. The Ayn Rand Institute of Los Angeles was also set up to promote Rand's ideas and research into them. Today, Objectivist groups around North America and the world listen to taped lectures on Objectivism, and Objectivist campus clubs have been organized in many universities. Yet, Rand's influence extends far beyond official Objectivism. She is widely recognized as a major influence on the Libertarian movement,

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 291-404.

<sup>6</sup> For a more complete account of the events surrounding this controversy, which this thesis cannot afford spacewise to delve into, see Barbara Branden's biography of Rand in its entirety.

and her ideas have also influenced some political personalities like Margaret Thatcher of Britain, and Malcolm Fraser, former Prime Minister of Australia.

Objectivist John Ridpath, professor of economics at York University, was at one time a speechwriter for Brian Mulrooney. British Columbia's Fraser Institute has associates who count Rand as an influence. The list of people who have been touched by Rand's ideas goes on and on, including business people, actors, musicians, and writers. Far from being an aberration on the world's intellectual scene, Ayn Rand's ideas are now beginning to have an effect far beyond anything she had expected. The fact that one of her associates from the 1950's, Alan Greenspan, is now perhaps the second most powerful man in the world as chairman of the U.S. Federal Reserve Board, leads one to believe that Rand's ideas should be given serious consideration.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For a more thorough look at the wide-ranging impact of Rand's ideas, see pp. 407-422 of Ms. Branden's biography of Rand.

## Chapter III

### METAPHYSICS

A proper discussion of the thought of Ayn Rand must, as mentioned before, start with a review of metaphysics, or the branch of philosophy concerned with the study of the fundamentals of existence. This topic is a very crucial one in Rand's philosophy, for it answers a very basic question: What is there? The answer to this question, in Rand's philosophy, centers on axioms, which she defines as follows:

An axiom is a statement that identifies the base of knowledge and of any further statement pertaining to that knowledge, a statement necessarily contained in all others....An axiom is a proposition that defeats its opponents by the fact that they have to accept it and use it in order to deny it.<sup>8</sup>

Axioms are the basis of all knowledge, and of proof itself. They are peculiar in that they are perceived directly but grasped conceptually. Rand's metaphysics, which is borrowed in large part from Aristotle, centers on three axioms: existence, identity, and consciousness. Existence entails that to exist is to be something, to have a nature and properties. In Rand's metaphysics, there are no other worlds or dimensions, existing outside of existence. Identity entails that what exists is itself and cannot contradict its own nature, for A is A:

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<sup>8</sup> AS, p. 965.

A leaf cannot be a stone at the same time, it cannot be all red and all green at the same time, it cannot freeze and burn at the same time.<sup>9</sup>

The concept A is A is one which Rand derives from Aristotle's law of non-contradiction:

That the same attribute cannot at the same time belong and not belong to the same subject and in the same respect.<sup>10</sup>

Consciousness is the faculty of the awareness of existence and identity. To sum up: "Existence is Identity, Consciousness is Identification."<sup>11</sup>

Because axioms are the basis of proof, it is impossible to prove them per se. They are the starting point of proof, beyond which one cannot go. They are perceived directly, and thus can only be emphasized repeatedly. As Rand says:

When [one] declares that an axiom is a matter of arbitrary choice and he doesn't choose to accept the axiom that he exists, he blanks out the fact that he has accepted it by uttering that sentence, that the only way to reject it is to shut one's mouth, expound no theories and die.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 942.

<sup>10</sup> Richard McKeon, (ed.) The Basic Works of Aristotle, (New York: Random House, 1941), p. 736. One may note that for someone who claimed to owe so much to Aristotle, Rand made few explicit references to his writings. The similarities must be discovered by the discerning reader himself.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 942.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 965.

Axioms do not tell man what exists, only that something does. They do not tell man what the identity of an existent is, only that it has one. And they tell man that he has a faculty of consciousness, but they do not tell him how he is to use it. However, axioms do assure man that if he accepts them, his knowledge can have a firm and non-contradictory base.

Rand's metaphysics regard existence as an unquestionable primary, a primary which consciousness must simply perceive and act within the boundaries of. Rand hence rejects the arguments that either consciousness is constitutive of reality, or else is wholly passive, and merely mirrors what it perceives. On the contrary, she sees consciousness as having a specific identity, as being an existent, an entity which is active only in that it can focus on different aspects of existence at will. However, this entity cannot actually create what it perceives.<sup>13</sup>

On this basis, Rand dismisses the idea that things are never what they seem, and that their nature is unreliable, changing from perceiver to perceiver. She sees this view of metaphysics only as a recipe for chaos in the other branches of philosophy. Conversely, Rand advises the individual to accept reality as it is and to work within such a framework, not against it. This course of action is possible because as Rand sees it, the universe is benevolent; it possesses a

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<sup>13</sup> David Kelley, The Evidence of the Senses, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), pp.27-34.



nature such that it does not work against man, but allows him to pursue his rational interests and fulfill rational goals if he so wishes. It is a universe that is benevolent not in every specific, concrete instance, but rather in an overall, philosophical sense.<sup>14</sup> The universe provides the human race with the potential for overall survival and happiness, if man is willing to adapt to it. Instances of suffering are temporary and insignificant, as far as the human race is concerned. If the universe were truly malevolent, humanity would hardly exist at all.

By upholding Existence and Identity, Rand's philosophy also establishes the possibility of objective knowledge, and therefore of objective communication. With this, her notion that conflicts among rational men are unnecessary is given a firm basis. For if man accepts that there is only one reality, and that it is not a contradiction, then he has the possibility of living his life without conflict. But if he accepts that there are ten or a hundred different realities, all equally valid despite their contradictions, conflict becomes truly unavoidable.<sup>15</sup>

In a wider sense, Ayn Rand's articulation of a clear stance on metaphysics makes the other branches of her philosophy more understandable. In this way, one is always aware of the point from which Rand derives her ideas.

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<sup>14</sup> Harry Binswanger, (ed.), The Ayn Rand Lexicon, (New York: The New American library, 1986), p. 51.

<sup>15</sup> P:WNI, pp. 23-30.

Thus, one has here set the groundwork for a discussion of the next branch of Rand's philosophy, her epistemology.

Chapter IV  
EPISTEMOLOGY

4.1 RAND'S VIEWPOINT

Having studied the metaphysics of Ayn Rand, it is the logical step to move ahead to a discussion of her epistemology, or Rand's view of how man gains knowledge. As metaphysics answers the question: "What is there?", epistemology answers the question: "How do I know what there is?" Rand contends that man gains knowledge by a very specific process and by no other. She defines knowledge as: "...a mental grasp of a fact(s) of reality, reached either by perceptual observation or by a process of reason based on perceptual observation."<sup>16</sup>

The basis of Ayn Rand's epistemology is her statement that A is A. If this is so, then things are what they are, and have a specific nature, unchanged by any "perspective". We can, according to Rand, focus on different parts of that world at different times, but this clearly does not mean that there is one world out there for each of us. By choosing to concentrate on certain characteristics of an entity aside from others, man is not automatically at odds with others who may have chosen different aspects of existence to

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<sup>16</sup> ITOE, p. 45.

direct their attention to. Thus, because we often look at reality from different vantage points, this does not mean that we cannot communicate our thoughts to each other; if they are different, all that is necessary is to integrate them with what we already know and come up with a more complete view of reality. In this regard, Rand would not fully agree with Ortega Y Gasset, for she would not automatically regard a viewpoint that claimed to be the only correct one as the "sole false perspective."<sup>17</sup>

Rand's epistemology also attacks skepticism, or the view that objective knowledge is impossible; that all man's knowledge is merely a series of competing perspectives, the absolute truth of which cannot be known. Rand views this as a contradiction: if one states that nothing is certain, then how did one come to know this fact for sure? This kind of skepticism, consisting of doubt without evidence or assertion without proof, cannot be considered proof of anything. Such arguments do not enlighten man's consciousness, but cripple and destroy it. This baseless doubt must be dismissed completely if rational men are to have no conflicts. For only when men realize that objectivity is possible can they discover objective guidelines for human conduct. The alternative is to condemn men to ceaselessly ponder every claim, whether stated with evidence or not. Such men, if they did discover institutions conducive to human freedom,

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<sup>17</sup> Ortega Y Gasset, The Modern Theme, trans. James Cleugh, (New York: Harper & Row, 1961). p. 92.

would do so by accident only. And such institutions would stand for only as long as the next baseless assertion destroyed them.

The core of Rand's epistemology is a discussion of the issue of concepts, since it is with concepts that man gains and retains human knowledge. The key question she seeks to answer is:

Do concepts refer to something real, something that exists-- or are they merely inventions of man's mind, arbitrary constructs or loose approximations that cannot claim to represent knowledge?<sup>18</sup>

Rand holds that the faculty of consciousness is man's primary means of gaining human knowledge. To gain this knowledge, consciousness must perform two key tasks: differentiation and integration. The first step in gaining knowledge, of course, is the direct perception of entities around oneself. However, man cannot possibly hold all the myriads of entities around him simply as they are, as individual existents. Instead, he differentiates them on the basis of essential characteristics. Then, using logic, (non-contradictory identification), man regroups these existents on the basis of such essential differences into much smaller numbers of units, creating concepts. As Ayn Rand puts it: "The ability to regard entities as units is man's distinctive method of cognition..."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> ITOE, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

But specifically what are these units, or concepts? Rand defines them as follows:

A concept is a mental integration of two or more units which are isolated according to specific characteristics and united by a specific definition.<sup>20</sup>

To make his concepts obvious to himself and others, man converts them into perceptual concretes, or symbols, using language. This makes communication of concepts possible.<sup>21</sup>

In order to be cognitively useful, these symbols or words must represent a concept that corresponds to a particular referent in reality. The actual word, or symbol, is an option for the individual, but its referent must remain constant, if one expects to be understood. As a contemporary associate of Ayn Rand's, Ludwig Von Mises, relates:

A man may call a cat a dog and the sun the moon if it pleases him. But such a reversal of the usual terminology,...does no good and only creates misunderstandings.<sup>22</sup>

The first concepts anyone learns to form are concepts of perceptual concretes, concepts that one can define ostensively. From these, one can begin the process of creating abstractions, or second-level concepts, which are derived

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>22</sup> Ludwig Von Mises, Socialism, (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1981), p. 10. In using the term "associate" here I do not intend to imply that Von Mises was in total agreement with Rand. For instance, Von Mises differed radically from Rand in ethics. He wrote: "The conception of absolute ethical values,...cannot...be maintained." (p. 356, Socialism)

from concepts of perceptual concretes, but which cannot be defined ostensively. From here, abstracting moves in two directions: towards more extensive abstractions, and towards more intensive abstractions.<sup>23</sup>

With this process, man creates a hierarchy of knowledge. As his knowledge becomes more extensive, man integrates initial percepts into wider categories. For instance, chairs, tables, couches and the like are integrated into the concept "furniture". Furniture, as such, is an abstraction, because one cannot actually point out a furniture. However, the abstraction remains valid because it was induced from reality. As man's knowledge grows, his abstractions grow in their complexity too, and the conceptual chain linking them with percepts becomes longer and longer. However, simply because this chain may become very long does not mean that all abstractions must be "floating" ones, detached from reality. One can still reduce even the most complex abstractions to their perceptual roots, provided one takes the time to do so, and provided that they were derived from reality to begin with. Such a process would not be fruitful with, for example, a concept like the Easter Bunny.<sup>24</sup>

As man's knowledge becomes more intensive, alternatively, he can subdivide abstractions as well. For example, table can be subsumed under end-table, coffee-table, kitchen

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<sup>23</sup> ITOE, pp. 24-25.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 25-29.

table, and so on. In this case, man narrows his focus, instead of widening it.<sup>25</sup>

This process of conceptualization is an enormous labour-saver for man. Through it, he can: "...reduce a vast amount of information to a minimal number of units..."<sup>26</sup>

In addition, Rand contends that the labour-saving nature of conceptualization should be used to full advantage. As she says:

concepts are not to be multiplied beyond necessity--...nor are they to be integrated in disregard of necessity.<sup>27</sup>

This is surprisingly similar to William of Ockham's "Razor": "What can be explained by the assumption of fewer things is vainly explained by the assumption of more things".<sup>28</sup>

Of course, this examination would be incomplete without a discussion of Ayn Rand's views on the nature of man's consciousness. Consciousness, in her words, is: "...the faculty of perceiving that which exists".<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 29-33.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>28</sup> Philotheus Boehner, (ed.), Ockham: Philosophical Writings, (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1957), p. xxi.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 37.



Although one can go into considerable detail in discussing Rand's theory of the nature of consciousness, for the purposes of this thesis one needs only to examine one very important contention here: that the faculty of consciousness is a phenomenon of this world, and as such it possesses an identity. All contents of the mind are thus derived from this world and from no other. Consciousness is neither part of another world nor a "window" on one. Thus, if one's mind is to function effectively, its data must be validated ultimately by sense perception. Otherwise, man's knowledge can become a chaos of contradictions: it will be comprised of some concepts derived from and validated by reality, which can be logically integrated, and some concepts derived from nowhere in particular (i.e., the god of revelation), which are impossible to integrate with anything. Such empty concepts, which defy logical ordering, Rand sees as an abuse of one's mind. They turn knowledge into a series of disconnected, irreconcilable opposites, instead of an integrated whole.

When knowledge is comprised of such a mix of valid and invalid concepts, contradictions become the rule. When one's concepts are contradictory, one's principles become contradictory; so do one's actions. The result is not harmony, but conflict and chaos. Under this kind of blatant subjectivity, objective communication becomes utterly impossible. This creates a social atmosphere consisting of perspectives at

constant cross-purposes, within which no rules can be decided upon, making resolution of problems and errors haphazard or impossible. The root of it all is the abuse of man's faculty of consciousness; the forcing of it to perform tasks that defy its very identity.<sup>30</sup>

A theory of definitions also plays a pivotal role in Ayn Rand's epistemology and, indeed, in all of her thought. A definition is, in her words: "...a statement that identifies the nature of the units subsumed under a concept".<sup>31</sup> Definitions aid man in: "...distinguishing a concept from all other concepts and thus [keeping] its units differentiated from all other existents".<sup>32</sup> Definitions identify the key distinguishing characteristic of an existent, which man can then grasp much more easily than if he had to remember all the characteristics of each existent. A definition stands for, and does not exclude, all the characteristics of that existent. It merely implies the rest of the characteristics that are not listed.

In keeping with the axiom that A is A, Rand points out that even the simplest definition can be valid, provided that it is in concert with reality. If one forms definitions within the context of one's knowledge, derived from reality, complex definitions need not contradict simpler ones. For

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 37-40.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

example, a child may form an early definition of man as: "a thing that moves". Later, when the context, or sum total, of the child's knowledge expands, he notices that lots of other things move as well. His definition becomes inadequate, but not wrong. He thus redefines man in accordance with the new context of his knowledge as, perhaps,: "a thing with two legs", and so on. None of his later definitions ever contradict his earlier ones; despite the new definition of man as a thing with two legs, this definition does not erase the fact that man is also a thing that moves; rather, it is implicit in the new definition. Eventually, as the child's knowledge expands, he creates new and more concise definitions for the things around him. Rand here is making some very important contentions: firstly, that knowledge is hierarchical, that it consists of a series of concepts integrated in a logical manner; secondly, that certainty and objectivity are indeed possible, not as out-of-context absolutes, but within the context of an individual's knowledge. Because of the contextual nature of knowledge, one need not know everything about everything in order to be certain. If the evidence accumulated in one's own mind leads to an inescapable conclusion, then one can be certain of that conclusion, given that sum of knowledge. If, and only if, new evidence makes the former conclusion inadequate, one must then arrive at a new conclusion, based on the new context of knowledge. Since men are not omniscient, or able to know things that they have never been made aware of, certainty

must be achieved only within specific contexts. The human mind, therefore, must act on the basis of what it perceives, having no windows to some other dimension. The mind has to function like a jury in a courtroom, weighing the evidence presented to it, and only that evidence. One cannot expect the jury to be omniscient, and weigh evidence that it has not seen, so, Rand argues, why should we expect the mind to do the same? In promoting the idea of the contextual nature of knowledge, Rand seeks to thwart the claim that since man cannot know everything about everything, he cannot be certain of anything, and thus must always be a skeptic. Acting on the basis of his knowledge, though, man can safely move from possibility to probability to inescapable conclusions (certainty) without any irrational fears that his conclusions stand to be destroyed in the next instant.<sup>33</sup>

Ayn Rand's chain of thought on concepts, so far, has shown how man moves from concepts of perceptual concretes to abstractions derived from the former. From here, he can move on to create propositions, and then principles. With these, he can build integrated systems of thought. A proposition, in Rand's words: "...applies conceptual abstractions to a specific problem."<sup>34</sup> Rand contends that in order to function properly, a proposition, like any other concept, must correspond to reality. It must state facts as they are, not as one would like them to be. If propositions are developed

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 55-60.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.100.

properly, man can solve problems and learn. If we use propositions incorrectly, with their words and meanings poorly defined and loosely arranged, the learning process is only stifled. In Rand's view, many people have learnt words without grasping their referent in reality, without learning that concepts have to be derived from reality in order to be useful. When this is the case, abstractions come to be seen as detached and "floating", as useless for one's life. Hence, so do principles, especially political ones.

It is this phenomenon that Rand sees as accounting for the confused and bewildered attitude that people have towards politics and political principles. Basically, if some concepts are derived from nowhere in particular, they will contradict other concepts derived from reality. Before long, the person who holds such contradictions will develop principles that contradict each other as well. Eventually, one's ethical and political ideas become not an integrated whole, but a chaotic absurdity. Thus, one has the phenomenon of people who (hopefully) scrupulously balance their own bank accounts out of recognition of reality, and then proceed to call for the government to spend itself endlessly into debt as if this practice had no consequences. As another example, one can see the phenomenon of people who complain about the burden of taxation one day, and then call for more and more government subsidies and handouts the next, which was the cause of their high taxes to begin with!

In such a scenario, it is little wonder that the present political world is riddled with conflict. Rand's relevant point here is that such conflict has definite epistemological roots.

Indeed, one can imagine how different the political world might be if politicians paid attention to Rand's ideas on concept formation. If, for instance, political leaders were to ruthlessly define, validate and logically integrate their ideas, it would make their pronouncements a good deal less vague and more meaningful.<sup>35</sup> What is useful in Rand's thought here is that she makes the link between epistemology and politics more obvious than it is often thought to be.

Hence, the nature of man's consciousness is such that the quest for knowledge can never be effortless. However, this is no excuse for man to stop trying. As Rand argues analogously, simply because nature does not tell man what to eat does not mean that he ought to stop eating! Man needs objective concepts in order to learn and survive, and cannot gain these by any means he pleases:

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<sup>35</sup> A fine example of a prominent person who makes tremendous use of ill-defined and vague concepts is businessman Frank Stronach, a major force behind the anti-free trade lobby in Canada. In a speech on March 27, 1988 to an anti-free trade rally, he made wide use of such vague terms as "economic democracy" and "economic justice" and so on, without ever defining, even momentarily, what he meant by such terms. The result was that his talk was not illuminating, but inordinately confusing, since such concepts can easily mean a hundred different things to a hundred different people.

No one would argue that man eats bread rather than stones purely as a matter of 'convenience'.<sup>36</sup>

Rand concludes her thoughts on this issue:

There is no room for the arbitrary in any activity of man, least of all in his method of cognition--and just as he has learned to be guided by objective criteria in making his physical tools, so he must be guided by objective criteria in forming his tools of cognition: his concepts.<sup>37</sup>

So far we have seen the basics of Rand's view of concept-formation: that concepts ought to be derived from reality by either direct perception or by a process of logical abstraction. Rand's point here is that if man does not abuse his consciousness, by exhorting it to perceive the non-existent, he does not abuse his concepts, by holding images of the non-existent as objective. Hence, he does not abuse his propositions or principles, by holding ones that contradict each other. Thus, one's concepts, propositions and principles do not conflict with each other. If this is the case, then one is well on the way to rejecting conflict in one's soul or in one's relations with others.

Furthermore, if man refuses to sustain contradictions in his ideas, then there is no reason why the political institutions he creates have to be irrational. Furthermore, if man rejects the void of skepticism, political institutions conducive to freedom can be erected that will not be destroyed by arbitrary assertions.

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<sup>36</sup> ITOE, p. 109.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

Thus, Rand, in her epistemology, seeks to offer a theory of knowledge that can both provide certainty and objectivity, and yet avoid the claim that one needs omniscience to achieve either. However, Rand still has much more to say about epistemology, and more to say about the mind itself.

#### 4.2 THE ROLE OF REASON

One concept that enjoys a great deal of prominence in the thought of Ayn Rand is the concept of reason. She sees renewed confidence in reason as one means by which this world may be rescued from its apparent decline. She contends that: "...man's mind is his basic tool of survival."<sup>38</sup> With his mind, man can act in order to survive. Survival requires: "...the guidance of conceptual values derived from conceptual knowledge."<sup>39</sup> Such values, though, are neither acquired automatically nor by accident. Values have to be acquired by a specific method, using a specific faculty. That faculty is reason:

Reason is the faculty of the mind that identifies and integrates the material provided by man's senses.<sup>40</sup>

This faculty is the faculty of the mind which performs the task of conceptualization. Conceptualization, however, is not effortless, for reason is neither automatic nor a means to omniscience. The faculty of reason must be exer-

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<sup>38</sup> AS, p. 938.

<sup>39</sup> VOS, p. 20.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 20.



cised by choice. To choose to use reason, Rand argues, is to live; to reject it, is to invite death. As the hero of Atlas Shrugged, John Galt, states:

Reason does not work automatically;....the connections of logic are not made by instinct....In any hour of your life, you are free to think or evade that effort. But you are not free to escape from your nature, from the fact that reason is your means of survival....<sup>41</sup>

To do more than simply survive moment to moment by killing wild animals with one's bare hands, one must employ conceptual knowledge. Wishful thinking, Rand states, hardly changes the reality of man's situation:

Everything man needs or desires has to be learned, discovered, and produced by him --by his own choice, by his own effort, by his own mind.<sup>42</sup>

The consequences of an evasion of this reality are made clear by Rand. Such people who choose to evade reality are:

free to unfocus [their] mind[s] and stumble down any road [they] please, but [they are] not free to avoid the abyss [they] refuse to see.<sup>43</sup>

To use reason, or not to use reason, is a basic choice that man must make given that he has free will. In other terms, man's basic choice is to think, or not to think. But this is not as simple as being conscious one minute, and unconscious the next. Man's consciousness, according to Objectivism,<sup>44</sup> moves from lower levels of awareness to high-

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<sup>41</sup> AS, p. 939.

<sup>42</sup> VOS, p. 22.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

er ones, operating in stages. The degree to which one is able to exercise one's faculty of reason, thus, depends on how thoroughly one concentrates on an issue in order to understand it.<sup>45</sup>

Rand's broad definition of reason puts her in opposition to much of modern thought. Reason is often seen as only one means to knowledge among many, (such as faith or revelation) while Rand maintains that it is man's only means of knowledge. Any other means she considers impossible, as only being a cognitive nightmare. The attitude that reason is inadequate is summed up by one of Ayn Rand's fictional villains, Ellsworth Toohey of The Fountainhead:

'Don't say reason is evil....Just say that reason is limited. That there's something above it. What?...'Instinct'-'Feeling'-'Revelation'-'Divine Intuition'-'Dialectic Materialism'. If you get caught at some crucial point and somebody tells you that your doctrine doesn't make sense--you're ready for him. You must tell him that there's something above sense. That here he must not try to think, he must feel. He must believe. Suspend reason and play it deuces wild.'<sup>46</sup>

As far as Rand is concerned, the alternatives to reason as a means of knowledge are simply irrelevant. Faith, which is the acceptance of knowledge without evidence, makes

<sup>44</sup> In using the term "Objectivism" or "Objectivist", I wish to refer to ideas developed by Rand's associates, such as Nathaniel Branden or Leonard Peikoff, who deal with many issues that Rand does not deal with fully on her own. Unless otherwise stated, these Objectivist ideas were sanctioned by Rand.

<sup>45</sup> Nathaniel Branden, "The Objectivist Theory of Volition", The Objectivist, Jan. 1966, p. 12.

<sup>46</sup> TF, p. 638.

knowledge a gamble. With faith, one holds knowledge on the chance that it will be valid.<sup>47</sup> But if it turns out to be invalid, advocates of faith are the losers. Alternatively, experimentation and observation, if divorced from the identification and integration of sensory material, are absurd. Observing things without identifying them is a waste of time; experimentation without integration (without plan or program, which requires reason) is equally pointless. Mixing chemicals randomly is not experimentation, yet this is what such a claim seems to imply. Alternatively, Rand would regard experimentation and observation as sub-categories of reason, rather than as wholly independent faculties.

Rand would also not agree with Aquinas' positive theology, given that Aquinas argues from the alleged need for a cause of the universe all the way to the all-powerful, omnipotent Christian god, when the logical necessity of such a transition is not at all obvious.<sup>48</sup> This constitutes a hopeless chasm that no "rational" argument can bridge. Aristotle's argument for the cause of the universe, which was

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<sup>47</sup> Rand would regard such arguments as those given by Blaise Pascal, to the effect that one should believe in god because one has everything to gain and nothing to lose, as totally invalid. Rand would likely reply that one has much to lose, namely respect for one's own rational faculty. Indeed, Pascal's argument winds up as a plea for blatant skepticism, and thus he undercuts the very case he is making: "It is not certain that [religion] is; but who will venture to say that it is certainly possible that it is not?" One might say that Rand would be so bold as to make this last venture! See Blaise Pascal, Pensees, (New York: The Modern Library, 1941), p. 84.

<sup>48</sup> Anton C. Pegis, (ed.) Basic Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas, Vol. 1, (New York: Random House, 1945), pp. 18-24.

adopted partially by Aquinas in his analysis, has a much greater measure of logical plausibility. Aristotle held that the universe was a given, and that all it needed was a Prime Mover to get it in motion. He did not attribute to the Unmovable Mover any characteristics other than those which were strictly necessary to fulfill its function.<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless, one must observe that Rand held that the universe did not need any such Prime Mover at all, for it is a strictly self-sufficient primary, an idea that is a derivative of her maxim that existence is an absolute, not requiring proof or causes.

Thus, man really has no alternative to reason as his means of knowledge. Indeed, to even question the validity of reason itself is a contradictory stance. Such skepticism implies that there are existents which our cognitive faculty cannot grasp. But, if it is claimed that such things do exist, then how did the perceiver grasp them, if not by a process of reason? Since consciousness is not designed to grasp existents "outside" reason, such considerations are irrelevant. Again, Rand's belief in the power of reason is a strong point in her thought. As far as she is concerned, reason is just what man needs to exist on earth, and he has no need to invent any unreasoned and false alternatives.

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<sup>49</sup> McKeon, The Basic Works of Aristotle, pp. 879-884.

#### 4.3 THE NATURE OF EMOTIONS

One of the more noteworthy aspects of Rand's epistemology is the light she casts upon the nature of emotions. As a defender of capitalism, she seeks to dismiss the notion that capitalism and its defenders disregard and negate emotions and that they are necessarily 'cold' and 'heartless'. In fact, the mere reading of the novels of Rand presents one with a world full of passion and emotion. Rand maintains that emotions are vital to man's existence, as long as he is not driven by them helplessly, in such a way as to defy his logic. Rand thus dismisses any emotion/reason dichotomy. Her philosophy seeks to integrate the two faculties, and refute the claim that the only choice open to man is that he must either be driven only by emotions or be a heartless monster. As we shall see, the man who is driven by emotions he neither understands nor questions is one for whom conflict is inevitable.

Emotions, according to Rand, cannot be erased; they are part of man's nature. Furthermore, they are a direct product of one's own faculty of reason. As Nathaniel Branden, long-time associate of Ayn Rand, writes:

The content of man's mind is the product of his rational faculty; his emotions are a derivative and a consequence,... which cannot be understood without reference to the conceptual power of his consciousness.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Nathaniel Branden, "Emotions and Values", The Objectivist, Vol. 5, May, 1966, p. 65.

The seeds of emotions are planted throughout man's life, as he goes about his task of identifying values and judging which ones are best for him. Man's nature is such that he is born with an emotional apparatus, one of his native capacities, but one that is empty. He has no native direction as to how to fill it. Thus, he must in effect spend his life programming this apparatus. Man holds no innate ideas, and thus no dispositions to feel one emotion or the other in a given situation. He is presented with many value-choices from his environment and his body, but is innately disposed towards none of them. His environment and his body will simply not think for him.<sup>51</sup> Man's task is to learn what value-judgements are appropriate to his being, and then use his free will to choose the correct ones, thereby filling up the previously empty emotional apparatus. He also decides which value-choices will elicit what emotions. The key to all of this is to know what man's existence requires, and to program one's emotions accordingly. For if man chooses values that are not in accordance with his nature, his emotional mechanism will still work, but will lead him only to disaster and conflict. If, for instance, a person programs himself to feel joy at being beaten, he will soon find that this conflicts with his basic needs (to have a healthy body). If he wishes to avoid such conflict, he must restruc-

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<sup>51</sup> As we will see on pages 44-45 of this thesis, man does have a pain/pleasure mechanism which he could try to use to make his value choices. But this is only a physiological faculty and as such its usage as a guide for action would put man on the same level of efficacy as lower animals.

ture his emotions accordingly.

To emphasize the issue of free will, it must be said that environment and heredity play a role in defining what value-choices are open to you; but, within that range of choices, they cannot force you to pick one over the other. That is for the individual to decide. Free will may be limited by the choices open to you, but this fact does not invalidate it.

As we have seen, in order to become an emotion, value-judgements need to be processed by the mind. When the value-judgement is new, man of course needs all his conscious mental attention to reach a decision, or, for instance, to learn a new skill. Eventually, if one performs the same task long enough, it becomes habitual. Provided, then, that a situation is not new, man need not always employ his faculty of reason fully consciously. The appraisal, the choice of good or bad, becomes largely automatic, manifesting itself in the form of emotional responses:

An emotion is the psychosomatic form in which man experiences his estimate of the beneficial or harmful relationship of some aspect of reality to himself.<sup>52</sup>

The process towards emotional response, according to Objectivism, begins with cognition, then moves to evaluation, and then ends with emotional response. But as far as man is immediately aware, the process seems like: cognition,

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

then emotional response. Because it is often such a rapid procession, due to our having been, perhaps, through the same situation many times before, the evaluation stage is mostly overlooked. Nonetheless, the value-judgement is there. Objectivism maintains that it is merely reached subconsciously.<sup>53</sup>

That value-judgement, reached at some time in a person's past, remains in the subconscious until it comes out as an emotion. The role of the subconscious with regard to emotions is crucial indeed:

The subconscious operates as a store of past knowledge, observation, and conclusions (it is obviously impossible for man to keep all of his knowledge in focal awareness); and it operates, in effect, as an electronic computer, performing super-rapid integrations of sensory and ideational material.<sup>54</sup>

The subconscious, then, acts as a great labour-saver for man: it files away past knowledge and automated value-judgments, so that man can keep his conscious mind focused on new items.

Nonetheless, as Nathaniel Branden points out, emotions remain a great mystery for most people. He offers several reasons as to why this may be the case: firstly, many people lack competence at introspection, so they cannot find causes for their emotions; secondly, many people fail to formulate their beliefs and values clearly and precisely. Instead,

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 69.



such matters are unclear, unfocused, and often unintelligible, being made up of pre-verbal images that have not been converted to speech; thirdly, the causes of an emotion may be complex and difficult to understand; fourthly, people are often only peripherally aware of aspects of a situation that elicits an emotional response, and do not pursue the matter further. For instance, a dislike of a person's mannerisms may lead to an inexplicable general dislike of him, and the reason may never be explored; lastly, many people outrightly repress their emotions because they offend their conscious convictions.<sup>55</sup>

Such views lead, eventually, to a conviction that emotions are to be taken as irreducible, unquestionable primaries, because their causes are not well understood. Thus, they may come to be seen as suitable guides to action. But if man is to behave efficaciously, he must never act without reason. If he, on the other hand, holds his emotions or desires as primaries, then whenever he acts on such desires he gambles that that desire is in fact backed by good reasons. If it is not, then he could find himself in unresolvable conflict with his own conscious convictions and with the desires of others. The danger of this is that by shutting off one's subconscious convictions from rational inquiry, debate and demands for evidence, one cannot decide on the objective validity of one's views. By this standard, everyone's desires have to be seen as correct, even if they

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

contradict each other. The end-product of all this is that everyone is in conflict with those who feel differently about a value, and there is no way to decide who is right and wrong. The only way to deal with others, by this standard, may well be violence. When emotions are held as primaries, and reason, arguments and persuasion are excluded from human relations, it is not surprising to see political institutions erected on the basis that conflict is the rule, and that violence is ultimately the only means men have to deal with each other. As Rand states: "If 'desire' is the ethical standard, then one man's desire to produce and another man's desire to rob him have equal ethical validity...."<sup>56</sup>

#### 4.4 THE MIND/BODY DICHOTOMY

Perhaps most indicative of Ayn Rand's belief that man can have a harmonious relationship within his own soul is her rejection of the mind/body dichotomy. The mind/body dichotomy holds, according to Rand, that the mind gains information from another dimension, while the body is a realm of uncontrollable, sinister emotions, chained to this earth, which constantly tries to foil man's mind. Thus, mind and body come into irreconcilable conflict with one another. Opposed to this, Rand sees the mind and body as an integrated whole, flowing from the fact that mind cannot exist without body, and vice versa, as well as the fact that one's emotions are

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<sup>56</sup> VOS, p. 30.

a product of one's mind, or reason.

As Rand views the issue, the mind/body dichotomy arose out of the view that the body, being from this earth, is low and base, while the mind, allegedly being of another dimension, is somehow soiled and spoiled by having to be bound to an earthly body. With this arrangement, all man can really do to achieve some degree of harmony between his reason and emotions is to try to strike a precarious balance between the faculties, usually by simply repressing "undesirable" emotions altogether. But the whole exercise is bound to fail at some point. As Rand has argued, the only way to deal with one's emotions is to seek out the convictions that gave rise to them; but when emotions are viewed as evil phenomena to be repressed, there is no way to change an inappropriate instance thereof.<sup>57</sup>

The root of the mind/body dichotomy is, in Rand's view, the failure of philosophy to understand the role of man's mind in his life and its relationship with reality. Because the mind is so complex and its workings poorly understood, it has long been assumed to be an other-worldly entity. Conversely, Rand views the mind as the originator of all human achievements, for which the data for the mind came from this universe and no other. She rejects any notions that human achievement is some gift or a product of mindless human labour. Of course, the body is not to be disregarded either,

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<sup>57</sup> Ayn Rand, "Of Living Death", The Objectivist, Vol. 7, Sept. 1968, p. 513.

for it is essential to give material expression to the ideas that originate in the mind.

Ayn Rand's concretization of her views on the mind/body dichotomy and the psychological effects of holding such views, can be clearly seen in her novel Atlas Shrugged. In one instance in the novel, Hank Rearden, one of its heroes, finds himself struggling to deal with a marriage in which he finds no room for sexual pleasure. His wife, Lillian, "...made it clear that she took it for granted that men had degrading instincts which constituted the secret, ugly part of marriage."<sup>58</sup> Hank thus represses, at enormous emotional cost, a basic human need, because of his acceptance of the doctrine that: "...women were pure and that a pure woman was one incapable of physical pleasure."<sup>59</sup> Such examples illustrate the foolishness of certain moral codes that accept the mind/body dichotomy. Such codes hold that morality consists of a series of commandments derived from another world, a world inaccessible to reason. These commandments, thus, must simply be obeyed unquestioningly, since they cannot be understood with reference to the real world, but only by "revelation". This code must be followed no matter what emotions it causes a man to disown; no matter what kind of havoc it plays with his body. From this doctrine one gets the idea that reasoned thought must be dispassionate and disinterested; that sexual pleasure is unhealthy; that a

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<sup>58</sup> AS, p. 155.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

woman must not have an abortion even if it means sacrificing her own life, and so on.

Rand maintains that if man upholds the mind/body dichotomy, he can never find inner peace or peace with others; his attempts to subvert his own desires to baseless commandments will make his life a ceaseless battle with his own self, thus giving life to Freud's idea of man condemned to an endless battle between his ego, super-ego and id.<sup>60</sup> By this, man will only have conflict after conflict. He will come to believe that because his mind cannot will the impossible, that the universe is malevolent, that its nature is such that everything and everyone in it is against him, including his own body, and that his fellow men are his enemies. This will be the case because the mind/body dichotomy presents man with a poor image of himself: that of a mind seemingly imbued with knowledge from somewhere else, but tied by a body to earth and its drudgery, incapable of true, full expression. Rand holds that if man rejects such a split, he can see his mind and body as a mutually complementary whole, and learn to work with them as a unit.<sup>61</sup> He must recognize his mind as a great tool, which allows him to shape matter to suit his needs; he need not be regretful that his mind will not allow him to do the impossible.

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<sup>60</sup> Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, (London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1961, James Strachey, ed.), pp. 91-104.

<sup>61</sup> AS, p. 952.

## Chapter V

### ETHICS

#### 5.1 RAND'S VIEWPOINT

In Ayn Rand's metaphysics and epistemology, she showed herself to be a proponent of an objective reality, and of an objective means of gaining knowledge from that reality. In her metaphysics, she contended that the universe is non-contradictory. In her epistemology, she argued that man himself has the necessary tools for living a successful life. In her ethics, Ayn Rand seeks to demonstrate how man is to use his tools wisely with an objective theory of morality. In her words, ethics is: "...a code of values to guide man's choices and actions..."<sup>62</sup> Ethics is crucial to man's existence: "[It is] an objective, metaphysical necessity of man's survival...."<sup>63</sup>

The novelty of Rand's ethics is that it attempts a defense of capitalism on grounds of ethical egoism, which has rarely been done in the past. The central principle of ethical egoism is that one never sacrifice one's life, values and interests to those of others. Rand contrasts this morality to that of altruism, which sees man as a slave to

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<sup>62</sup> VOS, p. 13.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

the dictates of others, under what one commentator has termed: "a regular cult of suffering."<sup>64</sup> Rational egoism is prevalent in individualist (capitalist) societies, while altruism is associated with collectivist, or socialist societies. Shortly, we will explore these two points in much expanded detail. Overall, the thrust of Rand's ethics is to make a case for a morality of rational self-interest that is derived conceptually from metaphysical reality, and is useful to man on this earth. In this, Rand proposes to find a moral code that is both practical and right.

Rand's ethics are centered on values. She defines values as: "...that which one acts to gain and/or keep."<sup>65</sup> A value is that which furthers one's existence, and might include food, happiness, foresight and intelligence, at least in a human being's context. The key to deciding what is a value is to employ a correct standard for judgement, a subject to be explored in great detail shortly. For something to be a value, it must be a value to someone, for some purpose.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, (London: T.N. Foulis, 1914, Oscar Levy, ed.), p. 259.

<sup>65</sup> VOS, p. 15.

<sup>66</sup> What Rand means here is that value requires not only an object to be valued, but a valuer as well. In other words, value, like essence, is a product of an interaction between a living organism and a particular object, which serves some goal of the organism. Rand does not hold that value or essence exists metaphysically in the absence of a valuer and in this sense she is not an advocate of intrinsic value. Furthermore, it is not likely that Rand would hold even the life of man qua man (see page 47 of this thesis) as intrinsically valuable, because even this value would be a product of the interaction of a consciousness with its environment or con-

For there to be values, there must also be choices and alternatives. Where there are no choices, there are no values or disvalues, only givens to be accepted.<sup>67</sup>

Before an entity can choose amongst values, or even value anything at all, it must be a living entity. It must be an entity which has a finite life span; one which faces the alternative of life or death. Rand argues that a robot could not value anything, because values would neither add nor subtract from his existence, which in a robot's case is a given. Even if the robot were destroyed, he would really be only dormant, for he could be reconstructed. In a human's case, though, death is final without hope of such reconstruction.<sup>68</sup>

Given that an organism is one which faces the alternative of life and death, how it achieves its values differs according to the nature of the organism. Plants, for instance, have only their sensory organs to tell values from non-values, requiring physical contact in every instance. From moment to moment, a plant acts automatically to avoid threatening substances and seek nourishment in a stimulus-response manner. Animals, in addition to seeking values in a sensory manner, also possess the faculty of perception,

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text. The value would not exist metaphysically within such a person or otherwise be self-evident, which seems to be what the idea of intrinsic value implies.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 23.



which allows them to retain memories of values and non-values. Once initial contact is made, an animal can then store this memory and use it to tell values from non-values in the future. But, like plants, lower animals act automatically to further their lives. They are passive reactors to stimuli, guided only by their pain/pleasure mechanism. For this reason, no lower animal can deliberately seek to destroy its own life.<sup>69</sup>

Man too functions by perceptual and sensory means because he is an animal. However, as mentioned in the previous section on emotions, he has no innate ideas telling him how to live. He could try to live by means of his pain/pleasure mechanism, as a passive reactor to stimuli, but this would hardly be living up to his potential. Since man's conceptual faculty potentially affords him a much better life than that of his animal cousins, it is only sensible that he make use of this capability. By employing his conceptual faculty, he can look at values conceptually, evaluating them in an abstract manner. Using his faculty of free will, he can then choose his values accordingly. By doing so, man is able to

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 20. What is meant here is that animals, by virtue of their nature, do not deliberately seek out dangerous or suicidal situations. Such activity requires foresight, which merely perceptual beings do not possess. What such animals often do though, is blunder into dangerous situations because they cannot foresee them. For instance, all a cow knows is that it must eat to survive, so given the opportunity it will gorge itself on prepared feed to the point of death, because the cow cannot conceptualize the dangers of overeating. The cow has no suicidal tendencies, but lacks the foresight which would allow it to avoid such blunders.

place his value-choices in a long-term framework, and avoid the hazards of living moment to moment. However, this faculty does not function effortlessly; at any time man can deliberately destroy his life if he chooses, unlike the animals. For this reason, man needs a moral code.<sup>70</sup>

Humans can try to survive by using only knowledge based on sensations and percepts, and disregard the conceptual faculty, but this would probably not grant one a very long or fruitful life. One would be reduced to a mere animal who could survive only by beating some very ponderous odds. In such a state, even the human race would not last very long. As Howard Roark, hero of The Fountainhead, relates:

'Animals obtain food by force. Man has no claws, no horns, no great strength of muscle.... To plant [his food] he needs a process of thought. To hunt, he needs weapons, and to make weapons--a process of thought.'<sup>71</sup>

But even if man realizes the need to seek values by conscious choice, he cannot merely achieve them by any means he pleases, nor can he choose just any value he wants. Man must learn that he will not survive if he eats rocks and poison. To act in such a manner would be to act only as one's destroyer. Man needs to be able to develop an objective standard by which he can tell values from disvalues. Rand contends that an objective standard of value for man is life, or rather a distinctively human mode of existence. She

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>71</sup> TF, p. 680.

writes:

The standard of value of the Objectivist ethics...is man's life, or: that which is required for man's survival qua man.<sup>72</sup>

Survival as man qua man requires the rejection of mere physical existence, and the employment of one's conceptual faculty to make life as fruitful as possible; that one reject life qua organism, of an existence governed by chance and blind luck; that one accept the responsibility of using one's conceptual faculty on one's own judgement; if one allows others to think for oneself, one lives only by chance, by the chance that those whose judgement is blindly followed will not lead one to destruction. Survival qua man recognizes the necessity of production in order to live; the rejection of life as a herd animal, subject to predation and dependent on others for sustenance. It also rejects the use of force in one's relations with others. Man qua man knows that he cannot reject reason and expect other men to serve as his prey, for again this would mean living by the chance that others are stupid enough to serve as his prey. Above all, he does not live as a range of the moment creature, but makes his choices in the context of a lifetime.

'Man's survival qua man' means the terms, methods, conditions and goals required for the survival of a rational being through the whole of his lifespan--in all those aspects of existence which are open to his choice."<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> VOS., p. 23.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

Since man is a living being, the logical point of his existence, Rand contends, is to maintain his life qua man, and never merely qua organism. When man asks: "Is this a value or not?", he implicitly asks: "Does this value serve the life of man qua man, or does it act against it?" The life of man qua man is the final value, the ultimate standard by which all other values are judged and without which no other values would be possible. If the life of man qua man is not the standard, then Rand argues that no matter what else is said, ultimately death becomes the new standard. For if the life of man qua man is subordinated to any other ideal, one is seeking not a human, but rather a subhuman level of existence. Rand regards such mere physical survival, or life qua organism, as only a state of living death anyway.<sup>74</sup>

Of course, as mentioned before, life cannot be sustained by merely any means one pleases. This holds just as true for individuals who wish to live the life of man qua man. To sustain one's life as anything other than qua organism, Rand contends, requires that one achieve values by means of virtues. Achieving values in this way is the primary ethical means by which one avoids conflicts with others. Rand defines virtue as: "...the act by which one gains and/or keeps [values]."<sup>75</sup> Rand holds three specific values as vitally important in man's life: reason, purpose, self-es-

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

teem. Reason is man's tool of knowledge, his purpose is happiness, and self-esteem allows him to take pride in his existence. To achieve these cardinal values, of course, takes three cardinal virtues: rationality, productiveness, and pride.<sup>76</sup>

Rationality means recognizing that reality is what it is and cannot be otherwise. It is man's most essential virtue, and the source of all his other virtues. It cannot be divorced from any other virtues, inasmuch as one cannot divorce a stream from its source. This virtue entails that reason is man's only source of knowledge, and therefore as his only guide to action. Rationality involves perceiving reality to the fullest extent possible, and to rejecting faith and the irrational, or any such ideas stated without evidence. It means never acting on desires and always taking responsibility for one's actions. Rationality also entails that one should not hold contradictions as valid and try to sustain them. It further entails that man is not only capable of using his faculty of reason, but that he uses it correctly, wisely and objectively; in other words, to the fullest extent he can. As well, rationality involves possessing integrity, and being honest, independent, productive, just, and proud. In other words, that one follow the rest of Rand's virtues in their totality. To the extent that one follows these virtues, observing reality and using reason fully, one is rational. As Rand says:

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<sup>76</sup> AS, p. 945.

To the extent to which a man is rational, life is the premise directing his actions. To the extent to which he is irrational, the premise directing his actions is death.<sup>77</sup>

As to the question of how one distinguishes rational from irrational perspectives, the fundamental rule is to apply the criteria stated above to the specific instance. For example, if someone stated that faith is a means to knowledge, a Randian would recognize this as irrational, for to him or her, reason stands as man's only means to knowledge.<sup>78</sup> While there is no automatic guarantee that these standards will always and in every instance operationally influence those who accept them in principle (as the dispute between Rand and Branden has clearly demonstrated), it is nevertheless arguable that occasional deviations do not invalidate the ideal of rationality, but merely illustrate acknowledged difficulties in its consistent implementation, which remains an essential precondition to social harmony.<sup>79</sup>

The contemporary incidence of rationality, on the other hand, is difficult to ascertain. It is perhaps possible to say that to the extent that you are alive, and recognize the needs of your nature and take steps to attain them, you

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<sup>77</sup> AS, p. 944.

<sup>78</sup> For further elaboration of this point, one should refer to the section of this thesis dealing with reason, on pages 28-31.

<sup>79</sup> In the dispute mentioned above, the evidence indicates that neither party was practicing all of what it was preaching, so to speak. But again, the thesis must refer the reader to Barbara Branden's biography of Rand for a more complete account of the episode.

enjoy a measure of rationality. As for the number of people who live up to Rand's standards, this would probably be very low, given that acceptance of her philosophy is not by any means widespread.

From this notion of rationality, Rand arrives at a set of derivative virtues, the second of which is another cardinal virtue: productiveness. Productiveness is the recognition of the fact that man needs to shape physical matter to make his life possible. Furthermore, it is a commitment to creative work to the best of one's ability, pursuing a career with full dedication. The existence of this virtue cannot be denied by pointing out that some individuals live parasitically off the work of others. Rand maintains that the existence of thieves can never be proof that productiveness is not necessary for life; no matter that some do not work in this world, for at least some others have to work in their place and deserve credit for their efforts. If you do not work, the fact of your existence means that someone else is being productive in your place. By virtue of this, Rand argues that it is foolhardy to pretend that productiveness is of little or no value.

Pride is a personal acknowledgement that, having engaged in creative work, having produced something useful, you have earned your values. Pride is the acknowledgement that your life is worth something; it is the well-deserved end-product of living up to one's values. To withhold pride in a creative

venture is to damn yourself for being virtuous; to be, in fact, a fraud.<sup>80</sup> To quote Aristotle in this regard: "Pride, then, seems to be sort of a crown of the virtues; for it makes them greater, and it is not found without them."<sup>81</sup>

At this point, it is essential to point out what seems to be an ambiguity in Rand's list of cardinal virtues. At one point, pride and productiveness are treated as if they are independent of rationality. However, all her virtues are supposed to be derivatives of rationality, so how could two of them be framed independently? Such a move seems redundant, since one can say, in terms of Rand's thought, that it is rational to be productive and proud. Just how this discrepancy developed though, remains unclear.

Another important, but not cardinal, virtue is independence. This does not mean living as if no one else existed, or refusing to build on the ideas of others, but rather it is a recognition of the fact that man has the responsibility to think, and therefore to judge, for and by himself. These are tasks which no one else can do for the individual. The individual ultimately stands or falls on his own judgement, and on no one else's. Thus, whatever conclusions you reach must be recognized as your conclusions, and you must be responsible for them. You must live with the consequences of your decisions, and not attempt to blame others for them. In

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<sup>80</sup> AS, pp. 945-947.

<sup>81</sup> McKeon, The Basic Works of Aristotle, p. 992.



other words, other people cannot be expected to think for you. As Howard Roark relates:

'There is no such thing as a collective brain....An agreement reached by a group of men is only a compromise or average drawn upon many individual thoughts....We can divide a collective meal among many men. We cannot digest it in a collective stomach....No man can use his brain to think for another.'<sup>82</sup>

To emphasize this idea further, let us offer another statement from Howard Roark:

'The reasoning mind cannot work under any form of compulsion. It cannot be curbed, sacrificed or subordinated to any consideration whatsoever. It demands total independence in function and in motive.'<sup>83</sup>

Integrity is another key virtue in Rand's ethics. It arises from the fact that man cannot fake his consciousness; that he should not engage in self-deception. Man should not, thus, think one way, and act another. Integrity involves having the courage to state one's convictions, live up to them, and accept the consequences. When one possesses integrity, one can possess credibility. To preach one morality while living another would be to expose oneself as a gigantic fraud; for example, to advocate the virtue of honesty while engaging in thievery.

Following from the position that productivity is an incapable desideratum of human life, the virtue of honesty holds that values should not be obtained by fraud or theft.

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<sup>82</sup> TF, p. 680.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 681.

Rand argues that the thief masters nobody; the dishonest man is the real slave. He is not a slave to greatness or intelligence, but rather to stupidity, the stupidity of those who allow themselves to be robbed. The thief hates intelligence, the intelligence that could help his victims to defeat him. As Rand says, the thief is himself a fool: "whose source of values is the fools he succeeds in fooling."<sup>84</sup>

Finally, the virtue of justice holds that one cannot distort reality, nor make men or anything else into something that they are not. Rand maintains that one must judge others on the basis of what they are, and grant them what they deserve on that basis. If a man is evil, judge him as evil; if a man is good, he must be judged as good. To try not to judge is as bad as making a bad judgement. One withholds approval from the good, and treats evil with the silence that it profits from.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, justice is a key principle that men must follow in their relations with others, if they desire no conflicts with their fellow men. No one should expect everyone else's judgments to always coincide with yours, nor should anyone seek to force such coincidence. Provided that the judgements of others do not impose on your freedom, then justice demands that others are due non-interference from you. If these judgements are made with evidence, then you must accept and deal with them. If, for instance, a person points out an obvious mistake of

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<sup>84</sup> AS, p. 945.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., pp. 945-947.

yours, you should correct such an error. If, for instance, Dagny Taggart no longer desires Hank Rearden, then Rearden must accept that Dagny has a right to make her own judgments too.

One must add here that justice and self-interest are very much dependent on one another. A just man needs to be self-interested because, if he wants to be consistently just, he must not only be just to others, but just to himself. If he is a worthy individual, he must acknowledge it. To do otherwise would be wholly hypocritical and a violation of integrity. As Aristotle reminds us:

For the unduly humble man, being worthy of good things, robs himself of what he deserves, and seems to have something bad about him from the fact that he does not think himself worthy of good things, and seems also not to know himself.<sup>86</sup>

One of the more notable aspects of Rand's ethics is that it deals with values and life on this earth, offering choices and reasons for making them, instead of dictating a set of out-of-context commandments. She also promotes what are some very reasonable virtues whose value is seldom realized today. Rarely does one hear much today about the usefulness of being productive, in an era where the state is obsessed with redistributing wealth while virtually taking for granted that such wealth will always be there. Such an attitude does not realize that all wealth needs to be produced by someone, and that such producers deserve credit for their

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<sup>86</sup> McKeon, p.994.

effort if they are to continue in their endeavours and if this society is to have any wealth at all. As well, some of Rand's other virtues like honesty or integrity could be paid more attention to, in an era where scandal seems to dominate the political landscape. In any case, one need not be a John Galt to appreciate that Rand's list of virtues do merit attention.

As Rand sees it, the solution to many of man's moral dilemmas is to develop a moral code that allows man to make the right choices of values, here and now on this earth. With a morality that is both practical and correct, Rand maintains that man can reach moral perfection, within context. Older moralities, most notably Christianity, failed in the quest for moral perfection by making their codes impractical. Rand's code, on the other hand, can be followed and acted upon, albeit with great effort. As for possible mistakes, one must make a distinction between an error of knowledge and a distinct moral flaw. Following from the contention that knowledge is contextual, errors of knowledge are possible, and those who make them are not immoral. Such errors are excusable because man cannot be expected to be omniscient. On the other hand, should the person fail to correct his error, even while acknowledging that it is immoral, such actions are not excusable. At this point, the error becomes a moral flaw and would be condemned and not forgiven, because the subject knew the correct course of action but refused to heed it.

As mentioned previously, Rand's ethics can best be characterized by their advocacy of rational self-interest as the rational man's guide to value-choices. Essentially, this means that: "...man must live for his own sake, neither sacrificing himself to others nor sacrificing others to himself."<sup>87</sup>

Rand continues: "To live for his own sake means that the achievement of his own happiness is man's highest moral purpose."<sup>88</sup>

As one of Rand's characters in Anthem relates:

'And my happiness needs no higher aim to vindicate it. My happiness is not the means to an end. It is the end. It is its own goal. It is its own purpose. Neither am I the means to any end others may wish to accomplish. I am not a tool for their use.'<sup>89</sup>

While Rand maintains that the life of man qua man is the standard of ethics, the purpose of ethics is to allow man a successful psychological state, a state of long-term happiness. This is to be done by applying this standard to the concrete situations in one's life. Again, unlike other moralities, which are largely governed by commandments with either no regard or only accidental regard for the life and happiness of the individual, an ethics of self-interest offers to individuals the possibility of a life that does

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<sup>87</sup> VOS, p. 27.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>89</sup> Anthem, p. 109.

not require the abuse of their mind and body when they follow a moral code.

But simply because Rand's ethics emphasize man's need for happiness does not mean that she advocates hedonism. Just as she contends that one cannot take emotions alone as indicators of appropriate action, neither can one safely take 'whatever makes one happy' as a guide to value-choices. Without a conscious commitment to a philosophical standard of value, such a person would simply be gambling that his emotion will actually lead him to efficacious behaviour. If his gamble is wrong, acting on his emotions will only lead him to disaster, as would be the case if he sought happiness by taking massive doses of narcotics. As Rand states: "'Happiness' can properly be the purpose of ethics, but not the standard."<sup>90</sup>

To make happiness the standard of morals would be to imply that the emotion of joy felt by a drug addict has the same value as the joy felt by a virtuous, productive individual. But in the former case, the joy is fleeting and only a precursor to despair; an attempt to goad one's pain/pleasure mechanism into rebellion. In the latter, though, the joy is the result of effective activity designed to allow an individual to live up to the potential that his life and his environment will permit. To expand on this point, Nathaniel Branden states:

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<sup>90</sup> VOS, p. 27.

To live for his own happiness imposes a solemn responsibility on man: he must learn what his happiness objectively requires....No belief is more prevalent--or disastrous--than men can achieve their happiness by the pursuit of random desires they experience.<sup>91</sup>

Another point which could be made here is that Rand's notion of happiness is similar to Aristotle's use of the word 'eudaimonia', which means 'success' or 'well-being', terms that Rand would likely agree with. Indeed, Aristotle's and Rand's ethics bear some significant similarities, in that they are both centered on the individual and his search for his own personal happiness, and both emphasize pride as a major virtue.<sup>92</sup> Rand argues that man needs lasting happiness, not constant satiation of momentary impulses; happiness that is a sign of the pursuit and achievement of long-term goals; happiness that will last a lifetime. This happiness must not be merely a sign of avoidance of pain or challenge, but an realization of the fact that challenges are a part of life and are worth accepting.

Rand's ethics, in defending rational egoism, reject the idea, voiced by some, that the moral (i.e. rational) standpoint in ethics is that which subordinates personal preferences and interests to "impartial" calculations in the service of the "common good", since it is often claimed that

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<sup>91</sup> Nathaniel Branden, "Rational Egoism: A Reply to Professor Emmons", The Personalist, Vol. LI, No. 2, Spring 1970, p. 203.

<sup>92</sup> F. H. Peters (trans.), The Nichomachean Ethics of Aristotle, (London: Kegan Paul, Trench Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1893) pp. 1-30.

personal interest somehow invalidates one's opinions with regards to an issue. But if the "common good" (as understood by altruists) is the standard, could one not be forced to betray the standard of man qua man? If so, then such a plan implicitly accepts life qua organism as suitable for human individuals.<sup>93</sup>

Rand's ethics also reject the idea that a rational egoist cannot logically expound his ideology for this would lead to more competition for the pursuit of self-interest and hence fewer advantages for him. This point ignores the fact that the ethical egoist requires a suitable environment in which he can pursue his self-interest. If, on the other hand, the world pursues altruism and collectivism, and all ethical egoists remain silent and perish, there is no personal advantage to be gained from such a stance. In addition, rational self-interest as construed by Rand would not be compatible with altruism, as one writer (among many) would contend.<sup>94</sup> Such an argument holds that egoism is good because it serves the "common good". But this idea is really invalid because an ethical egoist, according to Rand, is an end in himself, and not a means to the ends of others. The "common good" is not the primary intention of an egoist's actions, and in any case frequently lacks precise definition. In fact, there is nothing to prevent egoism and the

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<sup>93</sup> Sen & Williams, (eds.), Utilitarianism and Beyond, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 39-48.

<sup>94</sup> David Gauthier, (ed.), Morality and Rational Self-Interest, (New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc., 1970), pp. 55-63.



"common good" from becoming incompatible, because it would be easy enough for an altruistic version of the common good to demand that an egoist sacrifice his standard of man qua man. In such an eventuality, little benefit could be expected for any egoist.<sup>95</sup> Further to this point, the common good is sometimes interpreted as the total sum of the goals, interests and preferences of all members of a given society. To serve the common good would be to accommodate all these individuals. No computer could ever calculate such a sum; no egoist or any other individual could ever do it either.<sup>96</sup> This is somewhat like Rousseau's "will of all", although Rand would certainly deny that there is a "general will" that supersedes this.<sup>97</sup>

The "common good" for Rand would be a society governed by a stable, limited government, which would set up broad conditions under which an individual could achieve his own good. In this very narrow sense, one could conceive of a genuine common good, since a stable government, limited in its powers, whose major function is to universally guarantee free interaction on the basis of the standard of man qua man, would be of objective good for all. And even though it can be said that it is good for everyone to have a successful life, an intelligent disposition, a comfortable home and

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>96</sup> C:TUI, pp. 20-21.

<sup>97</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, The Social Contract, (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1950), p. 25.

so on, it still remains foolish to expect that the state could possibly arrange matters so that all individuals could have all these items. Since one's needs and interests vary enormously according to one's own context and situation, a state which seeks to deliver such a common good would be faced with a largely impossible task.

One can note that Aristotle's and Aquinas' versions of the good coincide with Rand's idea, in that happiness or success is seen as man's highest goal. However, a major difference here is that Aristotle and Aquinas see virtuous behaviour as a proper subject for enforcement by law. As Aristotle says: "...though it is worth while to attain the [good] merely for one man, it is finer...to attain it for a nation..."<sup>98</sup> Aquinas adds that: "Law must concern itself properly with the order directed to universal happiness."<sup>99</sup> Nonetheless, Rand would most certainly see little value in having the state promulgate and enforce such a sweeping conception of the good.

In Rand's argument so far, she has made a case for man's need of values in order to live. To achieve such values, he needs a moral code. It is only by following such a moral code that he can achieve values by his own means, and at the expense of no one but himself. In this way, he makes conflict with others over values an impossibility. To this end,

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<sup>98</sup> McKeon, p. 936.

<sup>99</sup> Summa Theologica, p. 744.

a rational man achieves values honestly, by producing them and not by stealing. However, he need not be a solitary figure. By acting justly, he may join other rational men in common endeavours, and seek their values by honest means. In other words, he seeks to trade with others.

A trader is a man who earns what he gets and does not give or take the undeserved.<sup>100</sup>

The principle of trade is central to Rand's theory of human relationships. It is the theory that men should interact on the basis of voluntary, uncoerced agreement towards the end of exchanging values, and do so in a just manner. Since a single person may produce more than he needs of a particular good, he can exchange this surplus for another's surplus and hence gain a wider and more useful variety of goods.

Keeping in mind that he must deal with others honestly, justly and with integrity, a rational man can trade with others, granting value for value, asking payment for virtues, not for flaws. The rational man knows where his business ends, and another's begins. His entry into the business of others must come by invitation only, by the making of contracts. And those contracts entail no sacrifices on anyone's part. As John Galt says:

Just as there are no contradictions in my values and no conflicts among my desires--so there are no victims and no conflict of interest among rational men....men who neither make sacrifices nor accept

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<sup>100</sup> VOS, p. 31.

them.<sup>101</sup>

## 5.2 SACRIFICE VS. SELF-INTEREST

As mentioned previously, Ayn Rand is an explicit advocate of a morality of rational self-interest. This ethical code is opposed to a morality characterised by sacrifice. According to her, sacrifice is: "...the surrender of a greater value for the sake of a lesser one or of a non-value."<sup>102</sup> More appropriately, this is known as altruism. Leonard Peikoff defines altruism as:

the view that man must place others above self as the fundamental rule of life, and that his greatest virtue is self-sacrifice on their behalf.<sup>103</sup>

Rand is adamantly opposed to any notion of sacrifice in her ethics. She is in favour of neither sacrificing oneself to others, nor of treating others as proper objects of sacrifice to oneself.<sup>104</sup> To sacrifice oneself to others is to give up greater values in return for lesser ones, which is an obvious loss for the individual. To sacrifice others to oneself is also a loss, as it would be if one, for instance, murdered a rival for monetary gain. This would hardly "benefit" the agent, since his momentary "gain" has to be weighed against living a lifetime avoiding the consequences

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<sup>101</sup> AS, p. 948.

<sup>102</sup> VOS, p. 44.

<sup>103</sup> Leonard Peikoff, The Ominous Parallels, (New York: New American Library, 1982), p. 83.

<sup>104</sup> This is apparently where Rand parts company with Nietzsche. See For The New Intellectual, pp. 36-37.

of being a murderer.<sup>105</sup> Instead, Rand contends that sacrifice itself must be rejected. Its only benefactor, she maintains, is the parasite, or looter, the man who produces nothing, expecting others to serve him without payment. The producer, under an altruistic morality, is rewarded only with suffering. The entire notion of sacrifice, Howard Roark relates, leaves man only with:

'...nothing but a choice of pain; his own pain borne for the sake of others or pain inflicted for the sake of self....Man was forced to accept masochism as his ideal--under the threat that sadism was his only alternative.'<sup>106</sup>

Such a choice leaves the rational man, in Rand's model, facing disaster. It leaves him torn between two false alternatives, much like Gail Wynand, Rand's archetypical businessman, in The Fountainhead:

'What else can one do if one must serve the people? If one must live for others? Either pander to everybody's wishes and be called corrupt; or impose on everybody by force your own idea of everybody's good.'<sup>107</sup>

By altruism's standards, Rand relates, the more complete the sacrifice, the greater the alleged virtue. The total surrender of one's values to forces that one actually hates,

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<sup>105</sup> Such consequences might include spending your life repressing, at enormous emotional cost, the knowledge that you are a murderer; organizing one's life around the wasteful task of trying not to get caught; and living with the fact that you have set a precedent, and that someday someone might apply your own standard to you. Like a dictator, you live in fear of the next coup. Such a predicament hardly seems beneficial.

<sup>106</sup> TF, p. 637.

<sup>107</sup> TF, p. 605.

would be the paramount achievement under altruism. As Rand's fictional villain, Ellsworth Toohey, says:

'No gift is worth a damn, unless it's the most precious thing you've got. Give your soul. To a lie? Yes, if others believe it. To deceit? Yes, if others need it....Be empty in order to be filled.'<sup>108</sup>

'Men are important only in relation to other men, in their usefulness, in the service they render....All growth demands destruction....You must be willing to suffer, to be cruel, to be dishonest, to be unclean,--...to kill the most stubborn of roots, the ego.'<sup>109</sup>

Rand's argument against altruism and self-sacrifice is based on her notion that man must prioritize his choices in a hierarchy of values. The rational man ranks his values from least important to most important, with his own life on top. When prioritizing his values, he acquires the most vital ones first, as quickly as he gets the means to do so. For instance, the rational man might assign far more importance to purchasing a permanent dwelling than to buying a resort cottage, and direct his resources accordingly. He values a home more than a cottage. With regards to his relations with others, a rational person would, for instance, care for a sick friend rather than spend money on a donation to the Humane Society, because he would value the former more than the latter.

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 300.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 365.

However, a truly altruistic person, in the examples above, would have none of this. The Humane Society would have priority over the sick friend, if the needs of the humane society were the greater. Similarly, if there were more cottage-builders out of work than home-builders, then the true altruist, (or utilitarian) would be compelled to waste his money on the cottage, because the needs of the cottage-builders are greater. Similarly, such reasoning can be used in an attempt to justify foreign aid, for example, since the needs of Third World nations are greater than those of the citizenry of Western nations. Thus, why give Westerners a "wasteful" tax break, when someone on the other side of the earth needs one's money? By this altruistic standard, the needs and desires of others come to have priority over one's own needs, one's own desires, one's own life. As Rand points out, this is what is often held up as charity. Leonard Peikoff explains:

'Altruism' does not mean kindness, benevolence, sympathy, or the like, all of which are possible to egoists; the term means 'otherism'; it means that the welfare of others must become the highest value and ruling purpose of every man's existence.<sup>110</sup>

Indeed, altruism defined as merely "helping others" is definition by non-essentials. By this standard, altruism has not been distinguished from any other moral philosophy, all of which have some element of helping others. If one defines altruism in this manner, one has not said much at all. This

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<sup>110</sup> The Ominous Parallels, p. 83.

idea is like defining socialism as "helping others", which makes it impossible to distinguish it from marxism, fascism, or capitalism, all of which advocate some form of help to others. But since a proper definition names the essential characteristic of the defined unit, the one feature that makes the unit stand out from all others, defining altruism as a morality of sacrifice is not inaccurate.

The morality of self-sacrifice ends up as a battle to bring society down to its lowest common denominator: the least productive individual. His needs are the greatest, so he needs and deserves the most. Since the key to success becomes lack of value, and productiveness becomes the key to punishment (the progressive income tax) individuals have an incentive not to produce, but to eschew such a virtue and reap the rewards of the welfare state.<sup>111</sup> As John Galt relates: "...sacrifice is the surrender of the right to the wrong, of the good to the evil."<sup>112</sup>

Conversely, Rand's morality demands that virtue be rewarded, not vices. Because of the principle of justice, the more competent one is, the more one deserves one's rewards. Without the encouragement of the productive individual to gain his potential, no one, no individuals rational or otherwise, can exist on this earth.

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<sup>111</sup> AS, pp. 957-976.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 955.



Again, one has to emphasize that sacrifice is the surrender of a greater value for a lesser one. Thus, the claim of a parent that he has "sacrificed" a trip to Hawaii to send his son to university cannot be called a sacrifice, even though such actions are commonly said to be. If this were really a sacrifice, a short holiday would have to be a greater value for that parent than his son's entire future success. Such a person would be admitting that he values a sun tan more than his children!

Rand is always quick to argue that the producers of this world are increasingly subject not to rewards for their efforts, but rather abuse. Every year, they face higher taxes and more regulations, which is crippling their ability to produce. As a result, Western economies behave sluggishly, and seem to dive into depression just when prosperity reoccurs. Perhaps Rand's advice to give more credit to the productive should be heeded more often, if we are to effectively deal with such economic problems. On a hopeful note though, the recent worldwide trend towards the free market indicates that her advice and that of others is beginning to be heeded.

Because Rand is an advocate of rational egoism, it is often thought that she must be against charity. However, she defeats this charge by making a clear distinction between a charitable act and a sacrifice. She rejects the idea that man must either use 'helping others' as the standard of his

life, or else must surely be a cold, uncaring brute who is completely indifferent to everyone else. This view, Rand contends, arises out of the idea that life is allegedly a chain of disasters and emergencies, and therefore that not making helping others the point of one's life would bring on the end of the human race.<sup>113</sup>

To deal with this contention, Rand notes that if life were simply a series of disasters, the human race would hardly exist at all in the first place.<sup>114</sup> She contends that it is the breakdown of philosophy and the abandonment of the quest for a rational system of living that is responsible for the fact that emergencies and disasters are rife today.

If one holds helping others as one's standard of value, then need becomes the gauge with which to judge who to help first. If this is the case, Rand argues that needs, and what is required to fulfill them, will become limitless. After all, what doesn't one need? However, there are very real limits on what the productive can produce. Demanding infinite needs out of a limited pool of resources is a contradiction that cannot be sustained. Rand maintains, though, that there is a role for private, uncoerced charity in society. She neither decries charity outright, nor views all who need help as parasites. But the rational man, in engaging in charity, must place his limits where self-sacrifice begins.

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<sup>113</sup> VOS, p. 49.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

In the interests of justice, those with genuine misfortune must not view their accident as reason to place a mortgage on the lives of others.

Concern for one's values, in this case one's loved ones, is not an expression of altruism. For the rational man, this is a perfect expression of rational selfishness, because his loved ones are important to him. Working to help them or see them do well is not a sacrifice, because their unhappiness or death can only make those close to them unhappy as well. Conversely, sacrifice in this instance consists of, say, abandoning your loved ones and seeing them suffer in order to help a perfect stranger, because the stranger could not possibly be of higher value to oneself than one's loved ones.<sup>115</sup> The rational man, in this instance, would place the effort or risk involved in the act of assistance in proportion to: "...the value of the person [you are helping] in relation to one's own happiness."<sup>116</sup>

Rand uses the example of a drowning man to illustrate her point. If a man were drowning and one, for instance, ascertains that to attempt to save him would be certain death, it would be treason to one's higher values (you would have sacrificed them for a lesser value) to attempt to do such a thing. Conversely, Rand contends, if you were drowning, it would be irrational to expect someone to die for you, for

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

his life could not be less valuable to him than your own.<sup>117</sup>

On the other hand, if a loved one is drowning, Rand holds that one could conceivably risk one's life in a situation of grave danger in order to save that person: "...for the selfish reason that life without the loved person could be unbearable."<sup>118</sup> Similarly, to walk away from that loved one would be immoral because you would have failed to attempt to keep the values that are important to you.

In this vein, one might ask if it is conceivable that a rational man could ever commit suicide? After all, does not Rand hold life as man's top value? Rand replies with the assertion that she holds the life proper to a rational human being as the standard of value, and not just life qua organism. If the rational man cannot live as a rational being, his life is not worth preserving. As Nathaniel Branden writes:

[A rational man] knows what human existence is-- and he will not accept anything less....The man who makes terms with the rulers of a dictatorship, the man who delivers his wife and closest friends to destruction in exchange for being allowed to survive--does not hold man's life as his standard of value. His motive is terror of dying, not passion for living.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>119</sup> Nathaniel Branden, "Rational Egoism: A Reply to Professor Emmons", The Personalist, Vol. LI, No. 2, Spring, 1970, p. 205.

Further to this point, one can ask whether the man who risks his life in war or as a policeman is acting irrationally or not. One can say here that if his task is to fight for his freedom and the right to live in a sane society, then his action is not a sacrifice. Man qua man cannot exist in a prison or in mindless anarchy. If this were a sacrifice, one would have to claim that mindless anarchy is preferable to the life of a rational human being. As well, wanting to be of service to society, as a soldier, policeman or civil servant, is only a sacrifice if that person's job involves abnegating all regard for his rights and the rights of others, suspending his own moral judgement, and declaring that he will literally do anything for society, no matter what (as in the Gestapo or the SS). Only when the state demands that its employees violate the standard of man qua man do their activities involve sacrifice.

Again, with regards to one's friends and loved ones, Rand holds that it is no sacrifice to feed a starving friend rather than spend the money on a movie. Obviously, to rational man, his friend's good health would be much more valuable than a movie.<sup>120</sup> Conversely, if the gift of food means that you will starve, it would be immoral and pointless to act in such a way. As John Galt illustrates:

'If you achieve the career you wanted, after years of struggle, it is not a sacrifice; if you then renounce it for the sake of a rival, it is. If you own a bottle of milk and give it to your starving child, it is not a sacrifice; if you give

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

it to your neighbor's child and let your own die,  
it is.<sup>121</sup>

For Rand, though, the issue of whether to help another seems to be very much a matter of personal preference, as if it did not matter to oneself if one engaged in a charitable act involving no sacrifice. As Nathaniel Branden writes:

If, in an issue where no self-sacrifice is involved, a rational man helps a fellow human being in an emergency, and does so, not as a moral obligation [my emphasis], but out of good will and regard for the value of a human life--it is worse than absurd to equate his action with the policy of a man who accepts the tenet that to serve others is the purpose of his existence....<sup>122</sup>

As one can see, as long as the action involves no sacrifice, the decision to help is not, for Rand, a moral obligation. Yet, earlier, she had stated that it would be treason to fail to keep one's values. As Mr. Branden stated, the person in the example values human life, in effect. Thus, would it not be treasonous, and immoral, for him not to help the other person? If the only criterion is that it is a matter of simple choice, he could conceivably simply not be of assistance, on a whim. It seems that this could be interpreted as immoral behaviour, and for good reasons. If, for instance, a rational man who values human life came across a baby lying face-down in a puddle of water, it would certainly be no sacrifice for him to pull the baby out. In fact, this would be a proper and imperative course of action for

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<sup>121</sup> AS, p. 953.

<sup>122</sup> Rational Egoism: A Reply to Professor Emmons. p. 207.

him. If he is a virtuous person, to abandon the baby would be to display a lack of integrity and honesty, as he would not be living up to the fact that he supposedly values human life. While Rand seems to see such an action as being of no moral significance, on closer examination, it should be, keeping in mind that one is not talking about sacrifice here.

Thus, in Rand's ethics, the rational man engages in charity, while keeping in mind that such actions must not constitute a sacrifice. He regards misfortune as uncommon, and never as license to: "...turn the misfortune of some into a first mortgage on the lives of others."<sup>123</sup> In this way, Rand contends, the rational man does not pretend to be oblivious to his values, but treats them justly and seeks to retain them.

### 5.3 THE 'CONFLICTS' OF MEN'S INTERESTS

Ayn Rand, in her epistemology, seeks to advise the rational man how to use his mind, and how to avoid conflicts within it. In her ethics, she advises the rational man how to avoid conflicts with his own nature and with others by behaving in a virtuous manner. The fact that such behaviour is possible and indeed essential to man's life leads her to state that: "There are no conflicts of interests among rational men."<sup>124</sup> We have yet to see how she develops her

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<sup>123</sup> VOS., p. 46.

<sup>124</sup> VOS., p. 50.

case more thoroughly for this statement.

One must keep in mind here that Rand is talking about a rational man, and not simply anyone in general. The rational man is one who follows an objective moral code, and who relates to other rational men as a trader. He rejects the idea of sacrifice completely. He realizes that he cannot expect others to sacrifice to him, and holds no anger towards them for not doing so; because he is a just person, he regards this as an entirely appropriate action on their part.

Conflict in this context means a contradiction. Thus, the rational man does not pursue contradictions if he wants to live harmoniously in a social setting. That is, he realizes that two people cannot both have the same value at the same time, (A is A) and seeks peaceful and objective means for determining who will get the value, like trade or competition.

Further to this point, a rational man is able to avoid conflict with others because he knows what his true interests are. He determines his interests by a process of reason, and does not blindly follow his emotions. As Rand says:

[A rational man] chooses and/or identifies his [interests] by a process of reason, and he does not act to achieve a desire until and unless he is able to rationally validate it in the full context of his knowledge and of his other values and goals. He does not act until he is able to say: "I want it because it is right."<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> VOS, p. 51.



In other words, if you can actualize your desires without violating the standard of man qua man, then you have an actual interest worth pursuing. If you can achieve a goal without being dishonest, hypocritical or unjust, it is in your interest to do so. If, on the other hand, you hold your desires as givens to be acted upon without thought, then you are asking for conflict. For instance, this would be the case if one demanded a share of a market for a product nobody wanted, or demanded the love of a woman who would not return it. The pursuit of contradictions or of values that are not open to you is in no one's interest.

Rational men, thus, live as producers, realizing that there is no other way to live qua man. They engage in production as best they can and compete peacefully, rewarding such effort with praise, not derision. Even if he loses out in the competitive process, the rational man is not bitter towards the victor, for even in his loss, he can learn valuable lessons from the winner and may utilize this knowledge to try again. In any case, fits of anger or mindless destruction will not achieve the values that such a person could not earn in the first place.

To make this concept more obvious, let us use the example of two business enterprises competing for consumer dollars in the same market, a market which, for the purposes of this example, can only sustain one business enterprise. Thus, one business enterprise is eventually going to have to leave the

market. On its surface, this situation seems headed for conflict, as it is obvious that both businesses cannot succeed at the same time.<sup>126</sup> If one must lose, is this not an example of conflict? Assume also, for the purposes of this example, that an amalgamation of the businesses is out of the question.

Rand would answer these questions in the following manner: To see this situation as one of a conflict of interests is to ignore the reality of the situation; namely, that only one enterprise can serve the market, and not both. No amount of wishing or outpouring of desires can ever make it otherwise. Assuming that the businesses are rational, and especially just towards one another, they realize that desires cannot achieve values, and that desires unnecessarily create conflict when they are held as primaries that openly contradict reality.<sup>127</sup>

Rand would also contend that to see this situation as one of conflict drops some important contexts. The rational man, or, in this example, the rational business, sees opportunities in the context of a lifetime, or over the long term. Hence, one lost opportunity need not be viewed as a death

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<sup>126</sup> In response to the question of what constitutes business success, one can only say here that a successful business must have some degree of profit and at least somewhat of a market share. To have anything less would put one out of business, but to go into any further detail here would be irrelevant to the topic at hand.

<sup>127</sup> VOS, p. 50.

sentence, or as proof that everyone is against you.<sup>128</sup> In our example, the business that fails to win the competition simply moves on to a field where its expertise is of use to it; perhaps the reason that it failed to gain the market was simply that it was not well-equipped to handle the job. In such a case, its long-term reputation is better served by concentrating on areas where it has the ability to do well, rather than doing poorly in an area where it lacks expertise. To continue on in an area where the business has shortcomings would, in any case, damage its credibility so that future pursuits might become blocked off. Indeed, our business enterprise, it seems, benefits from the momentary loss, if one looks at the long term.

In addition, pointing to such an example as one of conflict also drops the whole issue of effort and production. Values, and therefore wealth, have to be produced; they are not mere static items, simply waiting to be divided up. The business enterprises in question must be prepared to earn their place in the market; they should not sit idly by, demanding without cause that the market satisfy their desires without demonstrating that they in fact deserve this.<sup>129</sup> Again, as Rand reminds us:

If the frustration of any desire constitutes a sacrifice, then a man who owns an automobile and is robbed of it, is being sacrificed, but so is the man who wants or "aspires to" an automobile

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

which the owner refuses to give him....<sup>130</sup>

Instead, the businesses must compete, in order to see who is best suited to the task, putting maximum effort into trying to produce the best product, to earn the approval and support of the customers in the marketplace. But still, is this not conflict? Is it not brutal and unjust? Ludwig Von Mises offers this as an answer: "The function of battle is destruction; of competition, construction."<sup>131</sup> Thus, it is obvious that neither business in any competitive venture is out to actually destroy the other; rational men do not compete by blowing up their neighbor's factory. Instead, they produce wealth, and the one who creates the most and the best is the deserving victor. In the long run, all parties benefit. The victorious business has the new market, while the losing business, despite its momentary setback, enjoys a wider range of products than before, as a consumer. Because such a business is committed to justice, it simply goes on to other areas of production, where it may even be able to make use of new ideas that may have come to the fore as a result of the previous competition. Indeed, this is hardly as "destructive" as the manner in which potential talent is destroyed in a controlled economy when a business uses government protection to guarantee its success by slamming shut avenues for newcomers to the field. Von Mises concludes:

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>131</sup> Socialism, p. 285.

People say that in the competitive struggle, economic lives are destroyed. This, however, merely means that those who succumb are forced to seek in the structure of the social division a position other than the one they would like to occupy.<sup>132</sup>

One other relevant issue might be addressed at this time as well, regarding the issue of so-called "unequal starts". By this, is it not unfair that the free market fails to rectify the fact that some people come into a competitive situation with a disadvantage? Shouldn't, therefore, the most able be held back or forced to hand over the fruits of their ability to the less fortunate? Rand would most certainly reply in the negative. The fact that some people are less fortunate is not automatically the fault of those that are able. Thus, productive individuals cannot automatically be held responsible for the misfortune of their neighbors, and have a lien put on their life because of it. Such a course of action would be supremely unjust; little, as well, can ever be gained by holding back the most productive members of society. Furthermore, to use an appropriate analogy, Rand never held that Objectivism be given special favours by the state, even though the reception given to her ideas was very hostile and might even be considered unfair.

Thus, Rand maintains, the rational man can get along quite well with his fellow men. What they need is common agreement on basic, objective principles. As John Galt relates:

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 286.

'They say it's hard for men to agree. You'd be surprised how easy it is--when both parties hold as their moral absolute that neither exists for the sake of the other and that reason is their only means of trade.'<sup>133</sup>

'There is no conflict of interests among men--if they omit the irrational from their view of the possible and destruction from their view of the practical.'<sup>134</sup>

'There is no conflict, and no call for sacrifice, and no man is a threat to the aims of another--if men understand that reality is...not to be faked, that lies do not work, that the unearned cannot be had, that...the destruction of a value which is will not bring value to that which isn't.'<sup>135</sup>

One more issue with regards to the impossibility of conflicts of interests among rational men remains to be explored. If man is not infallible, if he can make mistakes and errors of judgement, then is it not possible for him to have conflicts with others on the basis of mistaken knowledge? However, upon a careful examination of the issue, one sees that this is not the case. To illustrate this point, let us suppose that Smith, an imaginary property owner, discovers that his apple tree has been cut down, and that in the full context of the evidence available to him, it appears that his neighbor, Jones, is the culprit. In the context of Smith's knowledge, Jones has acted irrationally. In Smith's context, there is a conflict of interests. However, let us also suppose that Jones was shopping the day of the crime. Thus, in the context of Jones' knowledge, it is

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<sup>133</sup> AS, p. 695.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p. 742.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., p. 742.

clearly Smith who is irrational for accusing him of a crime he did not commit. Will there not be conflict here? In fact, there will not be. When Smith confronts Jones, Jones will simply present him with the new evidence that he could not have cut down the tree. Upon hearing of this, Smith will integrate this new knowledge with what he already has, draw the inevitable conclusion, and drop all charges against Jones. As we have seen earlier, one's conclusions are always reached within the context, or sum, of the evidence available to oneself. If, and only if, the evidence changes, so must one's conclusions. In this example, the evidence did change, but both parties have recognized this, so there is no conflict. Both parties have established their rationality to each other. The only way there could be conflict was for one party or the other to disregard or evade the new evidence. Since an evasion of reality is clearly irrational, there certainly would be conflict. But honest mistakes among rational men are not the cause of it.

It has often been advocated, most notably by today's political leadership, that compromise is the best way to erase conflict in today's mixed economy. If one would only compromise, it is maintained, on any issue, at any time, there would be no conflicts between men. Rand maintains, on the other hand, that this is a foolish and deceptive proposition.

Rand defines compromise as: "...an adjustment of conflicting claims [desires] by mutual concessions."<sup>136</sup> While she sees, thus, a need for compromise in human affairs, Rand sees its role as quite limited. The basis of any rational compromise, she states, is an uncompromisable principle. Only concretes, particulars and minor details should be subject to compromise by rational men.<sup>137</sup> For instance, in a wider context, Rand would not object to compromise over the particular electoral system of a state, as long as such a state was committed to laissez-faire principles. Indeed, there are perhaps many issues that would be the subject of compromise in a Randian state, even far more than Rand would have admitted. Something Rand might have done in her philosophy was to look more closely at such compromisable issues, for there may be a considerable wealth of information here.

Rand's argument is best illustrated with her example of two traders bargaining over the price of a good. They may bargain, and compromise, over a concrete (the price), but they both understand, and do not bargain over, the fact that the principle of the trader is the basis of their interaction; the principle that the buyer must pay the seller something, and must do so without coercion. The buyer cannot simply steal from the seller.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> VOS, p. 68. Since claims in any bargain usually start out as mere desires, it is quite natural that there could be conflict; but this will be a conflict of desires, not of interests.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., p. 68.



Rand maintains that no matter what the price arrived at will be, it will always be objective, since it was arrived at by objective, rational principles in such a situation. She does not regard these details as being subjective, because as she defines it, subjective means out of touch with reality. In her example, since it is a fact of reality that man should gain values by trade, the market price reached as a result of such trade is always in accordance with reality and is what Rand terms "socially objective."<sup>139</sup> Thus Rand rejects the notion that the market is subjective and anarchical, and that the state ought to forcibly set "objective" prices. The bargaining process itself is not an example of conflict either. Conflict requires an evasion of reality; in this instance, both parties do not evade the fact that they have to live as traders. They recognize that the buyer must pay the seller something, so their bargaining cannot be said to be an evasion of reality. If the seller will not lower his price, for instance, it is a fact of reality that the buyer must accept. If he cannot persuade the seller to do so, he simply shops elsewhere. He directs arguments, not baseball bats, at his fellow men's heads. If both parties are rational and just about the issue, there will be no conflict.

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

Furthermore on the issue of compromise, no compromise is possible between two people who do not share the same basic principles; for instance, between the buyer who believes that stealing is equivalent to buying, and a seller who believes that goods must be acquired by trade. For the seller to compromise here, for him to turn away as the thief steals his property, is no compromise at all. It is simply a total, abject surrender to the thief's principles.<sup>140</sup>

To clarify this position, Rand lists three basic rules concerning compromise: firstly, in a disagreement between people who hold the same basic principles, the most consistent will triumph; secondly, in a collaboration between people who hold different basic principles, one rational and the other irrational, (the thief and the property-holder) the more evil will win; finally, opposing parties who agree to define their basic principles clearly aid the more rational side of the issue; when basic principles are defined poorly, only irrationality and evil benefits.<sup>141</sup>

Thus, Rand makes her case against compromise on basic principles very clear. Even the smallest concession by a rational man on his basic principles are a total sellout, because then the issue is not whether one will sanction evil or not, but to what degree. At this point the rational man has no defenses, having given up the principles that former-

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., pp. 68-69.

<sup>141</sup> C:TUI, p. 145.

ly provided him with one.

It is interesting to note here how much Lenin's view of compromise coincides with Rand. He wrote:

Every proletarian...notices the difference between a compromise enforced by objective conditions (such as lack of strike funds, no outside support, extreme hunger and exhaustion), a compromise which in no way diminishes the revolutionary devotion and readiness for further struggle..., and a compromise by traitors who try to ascribe to outside causes their own...cowardice, [and] desire to toady to capitalists.<sup>142</sup>

It would be foolish to claim here that Rand and Lenin share the same basic principles, when the opposite is quite the case. But they do share the idea that a distinction must be made between compromise on fundamental principles and compromise on minor details. Both held that the former was unacceptable, because it would deny one's ultimate goals, while the latter is acceptable because it allows one to keep one's final goals and can even help to attain them. Why this convergence of views? Lenin was a consistent communist, Rand was a consistent capitalist. Both held that no consideration should be allowed to obscure one's ultimate end or goal.

Furthermore, Rand was no advocate of the "Golden Mean" approach to politics. In her view, the middle way was not as a rule the best route to follow. To use a simple illustration, it is hardly advisable to follow a golden mean between

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<sup>142</sup> V.I. Lenin, The Essentials of Lenin, (Connecticut: Hyperion Press Inc., 1973). p. 607.

the extremes of rampant murder and no murder at all! While Aristotle did not intend that his rule be taken in this manner, this indicates that such a rule is suitable only within very specific contexts and must be properly qualified if employed.

Simply because Rand did not see compromise or the Golden Mean as a fundamental tool in ethics, did not mean that she saw no value in compromise. When confined to minor details, such as the price of a good being bargained for, compromise could serve a useful role. Indeed, one may conjecture that Aristotle and Aquinas, being men of reason, would have accepted the distinction between compromise on basic principles and minor details.

To make another point clearer, Rand's disjunction against compromise on basic principles can hardly be emphasized enough. To use an apt illustration, one often finds today the political left and the political right arguing over deficit financing. The left typically argue that the state should borrow a great deal; the right, however, mostly argue not for an end to the debt of the state, but for only less debt. This concedes a major point to the left, who are allowed to set the terms of the debate in their favour. Their retort to the right amounts to this: "If even you acknowledge that a little bit of deficit spending is alright, then surely you cannot argue that alot of such spending will not be even better." And the right usually

cannot. If the result is a bankrupt government, one would be hard pressed to argue that compromise on basic principles has little or no dire consequences.

The issue of compromise also relates to the issue of judgement. It is often maintained that one ought not to judge too much, as this can be a source of conflict. After all, not all issues are black and white, but often gray. But Rand asks that, since black and white make gray, how could there be gray without the former? The danger lies with choosing gray, a compromise, when one knows there is a black and a white side to an issue, a good and an evil side. This is only sanctioning evil and allowing it to profit. People are often, Rand notes, a mixture of good and evil influences, but this does not mean that one should not try to sort out the sides for an accurate judgement. No one would expect a court of law, for example, to simply take the middle ground in all of its decisions. Rand regards this refusal to judge as:

an abdication of moral responsibility; it is a moral blank check one gives to others in exchange for a moral blank check one expects for oneself.<sup>143</sup>

Thus, the rational man is one who realizes the necessity of production and peaceful competition, and never holds his desires as givens. Instead, he looks at what will serve his interests, the long-term values that a rational man needs to live happily on this earth. By looking at his actual inter-

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<sup>143</sup> VOS, p. 71.

ests, he sees that conflict is not possible between rational men. He realizes that it is in his interest to be productive, honest, just, and independent, and not to try to circumvent these interests by using force in his relations with other men. The rational man knows that this kind of behaviour serves no one's interests. Thus, a rational man relates to others as a trader in a just manner, never compromising on rational principles.

In addition to all this, rational men realize that all relations with other men in a free society must be voluntary and uncoerced. By realizing that all men are free individuals, free to make their own judgements, rational, just men do not attempt to speak for others, or assume unanimity on any issue. Since all men have differing goals, interests, and desires, it is essential that rational people erect institutions that can accommodate this variety of opinion in a just manner and ensure that those who wish to inject conflict into a free society are dealt with. One such institution is that of economic liberty, the free market. The other institution is that of government, to be erected not as the master of the free market and of men, but as their protector. Hence, we enter the world of Ayn Rand's politics.

## Chapter VI

### POLITICS

#### 6.1 RAND'S VIEWPOINT

Thus far in this thesis we have seen how Ayn Rand develops her metaphysics, epistemology and ethics. She has put forward her view as to what tools are available to the rational man (reason) so that he may deal with reality. She has informed us as to how the rational man is to be guided in his use of those tools (a morality of self-interest). This leaves Rand with the task of proposing the kinds of institutions that guarantee the rational man the right to interact with others without conflict, and also to guarantee that he will be protected from those who desire conflicts.

Rand is again quite explicit in her politics, as elsewhere, but again it seems as if categorizing her will be difficult. As one pair of authors state:

Evidently Rand does not fit into any of the ideological boxes we are accustomed to using when categorizing any given thinker's political leanings....Rand cannot be labelled as either a conservative or a liberal.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Den Uyl & Rasmussen (eds.), The Philosophic Thought of Ayn Rand, (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1977), p. x.

Rand's politics can best be characterized as a defense of radical, unregulated, laissez-faire capitalism, with the state playing a minimal, severely limited role in man's life. The state is to act like a referee in the economy, and not as a player. This of course puts Rand very much at odds with modern liberalism and socialism. However, her contention that capitalism must be defended on the grounds of a morality of self-interest has put her at odds with many conservatives as well.

In her advocacy of capitalism, Rand makes it clear that she desires no return to the past or to tradition as such. As Den Uyl and Rasmussen point out:

Indeed, she is not a conservative precisely because there is no blind desire to resurrect the past or maintain tradition for its own sake.<sup>145</sup>

As Rand sees it, in the past capitalism has worked very well, leading to monumental growth in the countries that adopted such a system, but it faltered and eventually failed because it lacked an explicit moral and intellectual justification. Prior defenders of capitalism often gave up morality to the political left and religion, and defaulted on their own arguments because of it. This is why Rand contends that capitalism's moral basis must be restored if it is to ever again flourish.

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p. 226.



According to Rand, given that man has a rational moral code that guides him in his values-choices, and given that he deals with other men as a trader by voluntary agreement, if he wants no conflicts with other men he removes the initiation of physical force from his life. As John Galt says:

'Whatever may be open to disagreement, there is one act of evil that may not....So long as men desire to live together, no man may initiate... -no man may start -the use of physical force against others.'<sup>146</sup>

'Whoever...initiates the use of force, is a killer acting on the premise of death in a manner wider than murder: the premise of destroying man's capacity to live....Force and mind are opposites; morality ends where a gun begins.'<sup>147</sup>

The use of physical force is obviously a very dangerous activity. It is primarily destructive, not constructive. Its initiation is the attempt, physically, to deprive an individual of his values. This force can be direct, as in the case of outright theft, or it can be indirect, as in the case of fraud, extortion, breach of contract, or libel (stealing one's reputation). These examples are not always characterised by explicit theft, or force, but amount to the same thing. Even the threat of force has identical consequences to its outright initiation. For instance, if an individual unilaterally breaks a contract with another individual, and keeps the goods that his contractual partner had a right to, it is the same as if he had actually gone to the partner's property and stolen them outright. But how can the

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<sup>146</sup> AS, p. 949.

<sup>147</sup> AS, p. 949.

initiation of force or the threat to do so be countered? Obviously, a destructive action such as physical force cannot be allowed free rein over society. It must be challenged and defeated where it arises. As John Galt relates:

'It is only as retaliation that force may be used and only against the man who starts its use....I merely grant the irrational man his choice, destruction, the only destruction he had a right to choose: his own. He uses force to seize a value; I use it only to destroy destruction.'<sup>148</sup>

Those who initiate physical force demonstrate their irrationality, and are to be treated as such. By violating the freedom of others, they forfeit their own freedom, in whole or in part. They deserve retribution, and such an option is one that a rational man can legitimately carry out in his defense. This retribution takes the form of retaliatory force, that is, the legitimate use of force by society against those who initiate force. The initiator is the one who starts the use of physical force; it is only then that society can take steps to retaliate against such a person since he created a threat where none existed before. However, Rand regards even retaliatory force as such a lethal weapon (it can easily become initiation of force if used improperly), that its deployment must be vested in common institutions specializing in its proper and objective use, institutions which would have the power to see that retaliation is carried out in any and every instance of an initiation of physical force, such that the rational individual

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 950.

can exercise his mind in a climate of safety and certainty. For this reason then, men need a rational government. Only a government can raise the necessary forces for effectively combatting the initiators of physical force, something that even the most rational person might not be able to do on his own should the aggressors outnumber him. Rand also proposes that this institution be given a monopoly on retaliatory force. It alone would have the power to take such action. The only alternative is to have hosts of competing police and army units, some of which might be run by lunatics, which would threaten the existence of individuals as surely as gangs of criminals would. In such a situation, the rational man might again find himself the victim of greater numbers than he, and society would collapse into chaos.

Again, the difference between initiating force and retaliating with force cannot be emphasized too strongly. If one does not make the distinction, then the action of a policeman is equivalent to that of a thief. Without such a distinction, the entire legal system must collapse.

Rand further contends that any rational society needs a set of laws that apply equally to all, so that men can be aware of what is legally permissible and what the penalties are for violations. In a system of competing or anarchical states, the problem would not be that there would be no laws, but that laws could change from one jurisdiction to the next, at any time, without any notice whatsoever. Thus,

a man could conceivably be shot for mistakenly walking across his neighbor's lawn! Clearly, this is not an environment where the rational mind can function effectively. Since even rational men can make mistakes in their judgements, it is obvious that all men need an impartial arbiter to view disputes fully and peacefully, and avoid the problem of men settling disputes in an arbitrary and ineffective manner.

One key question remains, though, with regards to the initiation of physical force. Clearly, one can see how this applies to a situation such as thievery. However, one author writing on Rand points out that many people, in everyday life, use corporal punishment on their children, or otherwise deny them the freedom to do as they want, by, for example, forcing them to go to school. Since the child might not consent to such actions, is this not a case of initiating physical force?<sup>149</sup>

As well, one can think of other examples of physical force being used against people quite legally, with mental patients, for instance. Mental patients are often placed in institutions without their consent, and subjected to medical treatment without consent. Is this too not initiation of physical force? If these examples hold, one can conceive of having to allow one's child to forego an education, if he does not desire one. Clearly, this is hardly reasonable.

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<sup>149</sup> John Robbins, An Answer to Ayn Rand, (Washington, D.C.: Mount Vernon Publishing Co. Ltd., 1974), p. 112.

Although she never addressed this issue, and could have well done so, it seems that Rand would have to make a distinction between rational and pre-rational people, in order for her point about the evil of the initiation of physical force to remain valid. A rational person would be one who has the capability, physiologically, for rational thought, whether or not he uses it, and is still entitled to his rights as a result. A pre-rational person, on the other hand, like a child or mental patient, has not achieved the full capability for rational thought, and cannot use his rational faculty fully. Therefore, he has inadequate knowledge as to what constitutes his best interests; other people must exercise his rights for him, even if he disagrees. Of course, the guardian could not do anything he pleased to his charge; he would have to show that the actions he takes are in the best interests of the charge's life.

Nonetheless, there is still another related issue to be explored here. This issue can be illustrated by the common occurrence of one's neighbors playing loud music that can disturb one to the point of not getting any sleep. Such activity is certainly detrimental to one's health, but it does not appear to be an initiation of physical force. Rather, it is a sort of psychological force. The initiator can and should be punished for his actions. How does this relate to physical force? One is only left with saying that if the stress leads to a person being deprived of his values, in

this case his right to peace and quiet, one might just as well have gone to his house and taken them outright (by physically bothering him). The key point is that one neighbor did not ask to hear the other's music, and by playing it that loudly, the aggressor gives his neighbor no choice but to hear it. He imposes, or forces, his value on others. It seems, thus, that this is the only way in which such an issue can be related to Rand's evil of the initiation of physical force. Once again though, this, in addition to such issues as age of consent laws and so on, are valid issues that Rand's initial presumptions lead one to immediately speculate on. It is unfortunate that Rand did not establish a position on these issues and eliminate such speculation.

As mentioned before, Rand does not think highly of anarchy. In disputing anarchy, she writes:

Anarchy...is...a society...at the mercy of the first criminal who came along and would precipitate it into the chaos of gang warfare.<sup>150</sup>

One can see Rand's point here quite easily, for in a situation of no government there is also logically nothing to stop someone from imposing one onto the situation, whether that government might turn out to be one that is completely rational or one of unspeakable tyranny. Rand argues, then, that it would be best simply to avoid such a possibility, and institute a rational government to begin with.

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<sup>150</sup> VOS, p. 112.

Another theory related to this that Rand takes issue with is that of competing governments. The logic behind this argument, often voiced by some free-marketeers, is that if the best products of business arise from competition, then why not try to get the best of governments by the same process? By this, the public would "shop" for the best government. Communists would have their sections, capitalists theirs. All governments would have to tolerate each other in order to make the system work, even if some are bent on conquering the rest. As Rand argues, this system is inherently unstable. It would likely turn out to be a system that encourages rather than discourages conflict.<sup>151</sup>

Rand holds that such theorists do not understand that men need rational governments in order to live qua men, in order to establish conditions under which man can exercise his rational faculty without interference from others. In other words, the primary task of government is to protect man's rights. Rand defines rights as: "...the means of subordinating society to moral law".<sup>152</sup> Just as a rational man needs a code of morality to guide his value-choices, so a rational government needs a code of rights to guide it in its functioning. Rights give morality political expression. Rand writes:

Rights are moral principles which define and protect a man's freedom of action, but impose no

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p. 112-113.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

obligations on other men<sup>153</sup> [other than to abstain from violating the rights of others].

In today's political world, the government is superior to the individual; the individual is seen as being at the service of the dictator or the majority. Rand is, conversely, opposed to any worship of the state or the collective as man's highest end or purpose. The individual need not submerge his own self within any state, as with Hegel's view: "The whole, as [the individual's] object, is that for which he sacrifices himself, and through which sacrifice he fulfills himself."<sup>154</sup> Similarly, Rand would abhor the idea that: "One should... revere the state as something divine on earth."<sup>155</sup> Nor would Rand agree with many aspects of T.H. Green's idea of freedom, since it is stated in a context which involves substantial state intervention in the lives of individuals.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>154</sup> Carl Friedrich, The Philosophy of Hegel, (New York: The Modern Library, 1953), p. 269.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., p. 293.

<sup>156</sup> As Green says: "The man who is determined by the objects which the well-ordered state presents to him is determined by that which is the perfect expression of his reason, and is thus free." In Green's context, the well-ordered state is something quite different from Rand's idea. See T.H. Green, Political Obligation, (London: Longman, Green & Co., 1941), p. 6. Also, see "On Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract" in Green's Works Vol. 3, (Longman, Green & Co., 1911), pp. 365-386.



Conversely, in Rand's politics the government becomes the servant, a paid servant subject to the same strict moral rules as the people it serves; the government becomes only the protector of man's rights, not their creator. The government of a rational society only recognizes the rights that man has as part of his nature; it cannot give and take them away:

Rights are conditions of existence required by man's nature for his proper survival.<sup>157</sup>

Although rights are derived from natural law and not from society, rights are recognized in a social context. Still, Rand would not see this as justification for the interventionist implications that T.H. Green drew from such premises.<sup>158</sup>

While rights tell government when and where they can become involved in the lives of individuals, they also tell individuals when they can become involved in the lives of others. Rights are the concrete means by which one knows where one's business ends and another's begins.

Not surprisingly, Rand offers only a very limited set of rights for man. She has no use for such "rights" as the right to an education, the right to a job, the right to

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<sup>157</sup> VOS, p. 94.

<sup>158</sup> Green advocated that: "No one...can have a right except (1) as a member of society, and (2) of a society in which some common good is recognized by the members of the society as their own ideal good." Of course, Rand and Green had very different ideas of the common good. See Green's Political Obligation, p. 44.

housing, and the like. These are not rights but whims; they can be fulfilled only by violating the rights of others, which can only turn a system of rights into a mess of contradictions, and hence negate the concept of rights itself.<sup>159</sup>

Rand sees man as having one principal right, from which all his other rights stem. This principal right is derived from the fact that man is a living organism, and that he must act to sustain his life, or he ceases to be man. As such, man's foremost right is the right to life. Rand defines this right as: "...the right to engage in self-sustaining, self-generating action..."<sup>160</sup> Furthermore:

The right to life means that a man has the right to support his life by his own work; it does not mean that others must provide him with the necessities of life.<sup>161</sup>

Thus, the right to life means that one has the right to act to sustain his or her life by any means possible, provided that this does not involve any violation of the rights of others to do the same. This right does not mean that, conversely, at the first sign of danger one may feel entitled to violate any and everyone else's rights in order to

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<sup>159</sup> One has, of course, certain obligations to one's children, considering that one brought them into existence and is therefore responsible for their well-being. Nonetheless, it would have been interesting to see Rand deal with this issue much more thoroughly. See pp. 89-90 of this thesis.

<sup>160</sup> VOS, p. 93.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

sustain his own life (i.e., to demand free medical care from others). Paul Lepanto states:

The fact that a right sanctions a particular course of action does logically impose the obligation of non-interference on others....But it does not impose an obligation of assistance on anyone.<sup>162</sup>

Obviously, man also needs material goods in order to survive. The right to an end (a man's life) requires the right to the means (physical objects), without which the former would have no meaning. Man could neither last long in an absence of food, shelter, clothing, or the means to cook his food, nor could he live long in an environment where such goods were stolen the moment he acquired them. Rand maintains, then, that the main corollary to the right to life is the right to property. As she says:

Since material goods are produced by the mind and effort of individual men, and are needed to sustain their lives, if the producer does not own the result of his effort, he does not own his own life....Whoever claims the 'right' to 'redistribute' the wealth produced by others is claiming the 'right' to treat human beings as chattel.<sup>163</sup>

The right to property, again, does not mean the right to simply take from others without permission and claim such goods as property. One has the right to gain and/or keep one's property, like any other value, but this is only the right to work productively for such values. No one owes you them, conversely, as a matter of duty. But if one earns his

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<sup>162</sup> Paul Lepanto, A Return to Reason, (New York: Exposition Press, 1971), p. 108.

<sup>163</sup> VOS, p. 91.

property, by honest means, without resorting to physical violence against others, he has the right to keep that property, all of it, and dispose of it in any way he pleases; of course, if he disposes of it on someone else's property, he must seek their permission. In addition, the right to property is unlimited and unconditional (with the exceptions of intellectual property and owning human beings). The state has no moral right to set limits on an individual's accumulation of wealth, on the grounds, for instance, that the "rights" of others are somehow more "urgent". As Rand states: "Urgent--to whom? Which wants are [urgent] beyond a cave, a bearskin, and a chunk of meat?"<sup>164</sup> Rand's idea of rights is a means to give man maximum freedom, the freedom he needs to live, while also making him responsible for his actions and his property, so that all individuals can enjoy their freedom. She writes:

Since men are neither omniscient nor infallible, they must be free to disagree,, to cooperate or to pursue their own independent course, each according to his own rational judgement. Freedom is the fundamental requirement of man's mind.<sup>165</sup>

Rand's outlook on rights indeed seems to be one of the strongest points of her political theory. She decries such notions as special rights for minorities, women, business, labour, and the like, as being completely invalid. For her, a code of rights applies to everyone, at all times. Rand contends that rights cannot be voiced without any context

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<sup>164</sup> C:TUI, p. 33.

<sup>165</sup> C:TUI., p. 17.

whatsoever, as if the rights of one person could be enhanced by depriving another of his rights. She says:

If some men are entitled by right to the products...of others, it means that those others are deprived of rights and condemned to slave labour.<sup>166</sup>

One can say that Rand's theory of property rights, although not original, is well-argued and well-developed. Such arguments are essential for a decent defense of economic liberty.

As for the issue of rights for groups, Rand contends that groups have only the sum of the rights of each individual who voluntarily joined the group. Thus, no group, on the basis of sex, colour, heritage or whatever, can claim special rights over and above the rights of the rest of the population. Again, Rand says:

When individual rights are abrogated, there is no way to determine who is entitled to what; there is no way to determine the justice of anyone's claims, desires, or needs.<sup>167</sup>

As Rand sees it, the major source of political conflict, and a major reason why people seem unable to live together peacefully, is the wholesale abrogation of man's rights on the part of the state, most conspicuously, man's right to property. It is only when individual rights are brought under the full protection of the law that society can begin to control conflict as it should be.

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<sup>166</sup> VOS., p. 96.

<sup>167</sup> C:TUI, p. 37.

Of course, Rand does not deny the importance of freedom of speech, the press, association, and the like. She only regards these as derivatives of the rights that she set out, and would regard them as meaningless if they were not supported by the right to life, action, and property. Rand does not thus argue for the abolition of the right to vote, or a dictatorship. What she does state is that democracy, or majority rule, must be strictly limited by constitutional means. This entails that the majority will be allowed to decide who runs the police, the courts and the military, and who will be the custodians of state property. Otherwise, the majority potentially becomes an abuser and violator of individual rights, since there is nothing to stop such abuses from occurring.

One must recall here that man's rights are inalienable; that is, they are not a gift of the state or the majority, and thus such bodies have no business abrogating them. If one is to have a government of laws, and not of people, it is neither unreasonable nor unfair that limits be placed on the powers of the majority or state. Neither Rand, nor, for that matter, the American Founding Fathers, were tyrants bent on repressing the will of the governed. What they desired was that the freedoms of the individual or minority should be respected as fully as possible, since disagreement with the majority does not automatically invalidate minority interests.

Rand's notion of property rights are quite central to her advocacy of laissez-faire capitalism, and she expands on these rights at length. In talking of property, and the kinds of protection that the state must grant to property holders, she makes a distinction between intellectual and material property. Both, she contends, deserve the protection of the government, but in different ways. Material property can be held in perpetuity by individuals, and passed on from generation to generation without any problems. As mentioned before, all holders of property may dispose of that property in any way they please, including giving it to heirs. Intellectual property, though, that being the property protected by patents and copyrights, cannot be held in perpetuity. While it is vital to man's progress that patents and copyrights be enforced by the state, Rand notes that it would be foolish to grant such rights for an infinite amount of time. One can barely imagine the difficulty of, for instance, paying royalties to the heirs of the inventor of the lightbulb five hundred or a thousand years after his death! Rand summarizes her position as follows:

The inheritance of material property represents a dynamic claim on a static amount of wealth; the inheritance of intellectual property represents a static claim on a dynamic process of production.<sup>168</sup>

Rand favours the British system of copyrights, where royalties end fifty years after the author's death. In the case of patents, the time period must be much shorter, so as not

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

to hold up scientific progress, but it must be sufficient for the inventor to recoup his investments and attain the benefits due to him. And even when the patent or copyright does expire, Rand holds that this does not make it the property of the state, to be redistributed. Instead, the benefits go to those individuals who continue production using the idea, and who improve upon it.<sup>169</sup>

Nonetheless, there are still some important issues regarding Rand's idea of property rights to be discussed. One author raises the issue of how wealth, or property, ought to be distributed. George Mavrodes makes the point that since Rand maintains that all property and wealth are produced by man's mind and labour, how can all land, minerals, and forests be called property, since they were not created by man? As well, Mavrodes makes the point that if it is legitimate to limit ownership of intellectual property, since it could otherwise be held in perpetuity with disastrous results, why not then limit the ownership of some types of property, like land? After all, he argues, forces of nature do not diminish and thus limit the life of a piece of land. For other items, like cars, it does, so these types of property cannot be inherited indefinitely. With land, though, this is easily done. Hence, is it not unfair to future generations who are deprived of their chance to acquire land? As Mavrodes says: "If we do not have a moral

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid., pp. 130-134. One might add here that the particular length of a patent or copyright is another area where compromise is possible.



duty to pay royalties to the heirs of the inventor of the wheel then we likewise have no moral duty to pay rent to the heirs of the homesteaders..."<sup>170</sup>

In reply, Rand would contend that to remain of value, any property, including land, requires some effort for it to remain a value. Even if a man owns property for a very long time and passes it down through many generations, this does not make the owner a parasite. To remain of value, any land must be constantly improved and used, guarded against erosion and the like. If it were left idle, even the money tied up in buying the land in the first place would yield a negative investment. For how many generations could a line of heirs afford this drain on their resources? If the heirs do not keep up the land, market forces dictate that the cost of their sloth will eventually force them to turn the land over to someone who will provide the effort required to manage the land properly. As David Bold puts it: "...natural resources necessarily require, in some form, the application of human knowledge and effort. Man causes natural resources to have value and, therefore, to be property."<sup>171</sup> Thus, under Rand's idea of property, ownership of land would not have to be limited, because it still is a dynamic claim on a static amount of wealth. Land cannot be, for all time, a source of guaranteed, and therefore unearned wealth. As

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<sup>170</sup> George Mavrodes, "Property", The Personalist, Vol. LV, No. 1, Summer 1972, p. 260.

<sup>171</sup> David Bold, "Comments on Mavrodes' 'Property'", The Personalist, Vol. LV, No. 2, Spring 1974, p. 190.

David Bold adds again: "Neither farm acreage, nor the inheritance of industrial concerns can provide an heir with automatic economic security, if he fails to think and to work."<sup>172</sup> As Francisco D'Anconia, a hero of Atlas Shrugged, relates:

Only the man who does not need it, is fit to inherit wealth-- the man who would make his own fortune no matter where he started. If an heir is equal to his money, it serves him; if not, it destroys him....Do not envy a worthless heir; his wealth is not yours and you would have done no better with it. Do not think that it should have been distributed among you; loading the world with fifty parasites instead of one will not bring back the dead virtue which was the fortune.<sup>173</sup>

Another related question that Rand's discussion of property rights raises is how one would morally establish property rights to begin with, in a situation of virgin lands, with no real owners, such as one had in the North American West in the late 1800's. Here, Rand agrees that the state has a role, which is to define property, by acting as custodian of such virgin lands until they can be parcelled out on the basis of minimal effort at homesteading the piece of land one was granted. Rand explicitly agrees with the United States' Homestead Act here. With any new resource, like mineral deposits, the state has a role in passing out such property to individuals as quickly as possible.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., p. 191.

<sup>173</sup> AS, p. 388.

<sup>174</sup> C:TUI, pp. 122-123.

Yet another issue remains. Virgin lands are rarely uninhabited, witness the American Indians. Since they were here first, should they not have been the owners of the land, and should the settlers not have bought it from them? Indeed, it seems that the Indians put a great deal of effort into making the land more valuable, by building dwellings on it and in some cases cultivating it. Were they not, then, the real owners?<sup>175</sup>

However, one defender of Rand's ideas answers: "To what extent it is appropriate to lump all those who lived in North America into one group called 'the Indians' is questionable."<sup>176</sup> Indeed, the Indians were hardly a homogenous group, consisting of hundreds of different tribes, few of whom, if any, had much of an idea where their lands began and another tribe's ended. Without clear property boundaries, one could, for the most part, never tell accurately just who owned what lands. It was, Rand would contend, far simpler to start from a position of no property and parcel it out on a first-come, first-served basis. While this period of history was characterized by ill-will and brutality towards Indians, and the Homestead Act was not always applied fairly, it nonetheless is, in principle, a proper approach to take in situations similar to this one.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> George Mavrodes, "A Reply to Professor Machan", The Personalist, Vol LV, No. 1, Spring 1974, p. 187.

<sup>176</sup> Tibor Machan, "On Justifying Property Rights, Again", The Personalist, Vol. LVI, No. 1, Winter 1975, p. 75.

<sup>177</sup> From the tape-recorded lecture series, "The Philosophy

Thus, the proper function of a rational government is the protection of man's rights by use of the legitimate means of retaliatory force against violators of those rights. As Rand sees it, government must thus be limited to three main functions: the provision of an armed forces, a police force, and a court system. The armed forces function to protect man's rights from external criminals; the police force's role is to protect man's rights from internal criminals; and the role of the courts is to provide protection of property and contracts from fraud, theft, and breaches of contract.<sup>178</sup> As mentioned before, the state also protects and registers copyrights and patents. All these functions would be set forth in a constitution.

As one can probably guess, Rand's idea of a laissez-faire capitalist society put into practical effect would be markedly different from anything one sees in the world today. There would be, for all intents and purposes, no welfare state, no redistribution of income, no crown corporations or nationalization of industry. The regulatory functions of government would be virtually non-existent; no more health, food, or safety regulations. Radio and television frequen-

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of Objectivism", by Leonard Peikoff, 1976. Despite the fact that enormous injustices were perpetrated against American Indians, which Rand seems to be unfortunately unaware of, it still bears arguing that even if such lands were taken unfairly, it would be foolish to hold individuals alive today as responsible for misdeeds committed by people who lived over a century ago. A formal apology by the state might be in order, though.

<sup>178</sup> AS, p. 987.

cies not already assigned could be handed out on a first-come, first-served basis, or by lottery, with no attached conditions (e.g., a certain percentage of Canadian content).<sup>179</sup> Crown lands, whether they contain lakes and rivers, forests or mineral deposits, or even national parks, would be sold off as quickly as possible. Matters of pollution would not be, for the most part, a subject of government regulations, but rather disputes relating to such matters would be settled in court between the polluter and the person whose land he was polluting. Only in the case of air pollution does Rand allow the state any role, because normal property boundaries do not apply there. Similarly, the state could retain a role in licensing and testing aircraft pilots, and in regulating the movement of aircraft.<sup>180</sup> To the extent that the state remains as owner of roads, lakes and rivers, one might add that legislation would be necessary to counter pollution here, a fact that Rand either did not recognize or did not care to deal with.

Perhaps one of the most contentious issues that Rand deals with in her discussion of the role of government in a free society is the issue of education. She contends that education is not a matter in which the state should be involved, whether it be at the primary, secondary or terti-

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<sup>179</sup> For a more thorough discussion of the Objectivist position on health and safety regulations, and on broadcasting regulation, see "The Assault on Integrity", and "The Property Status of the Airwaves", respectively, in Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal.

<sup>180</sup> TNL, p. 89.

ary levels. Education is the responsibility of the parents and/or individuals who want it. If competition in the business field gives one the best product there, Rand reasons that competition in the field of education would also result in better products. To have such matters as education in the hands of the state is to eliminate the free choice of individuals as to what kinds of ideas their children will be taught.<sup>181</sup> Whatever subject material one wishes to study should be left up to the free choice of the parents and/or students involved, in concert with the school that they wish to attend. In the case that one cannot afford schooling for one's children, this is no excuse to put a lien on the lives of others to force them to pay for educating your children. Having children is a grave responsibility that cannot fairly be placed on others at random.

Gone also, in a laissez-faire society, would be the government's power to regulate prices and competition, as it now does with regards to trucking and airlines. In addition, it would not have the power to enforce certain trade practices and combines acts. Rand regards such powers as utterly arbitrary and unjustifiable, and contends further that monopolies result more as a result of government controls, and not because there are not enough.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., pp. 187-239, and C:TUI, pp. 89-92.

<sup>182</sup> C:TUI, pp. 63-71. Rand's argument against restraint of trade laws is as follows. If a business, operating in a truly free market, becomes monopolistic or oligopolistic, then it does so because consumers have, in effect, voted for such an arrangement with their buying power.

Rand's state would also have no role in the provision of welfare or medical services. These acts she regards not as charity, but as outright theft. She contends that no one is any less of a thief even if the stolen goods all go to the poor. As for some government programs like pensions or unemployment insurance, a rational government would continue them with contributions made on a voluntary basis. Such contributions would no longer be mandatory.

Where roadways are presently owned by the state, it would probably be very difficult to privatise them. However, the system could be made more equitable by financing them out of fees levied on vehicles, and not out of taxes. But in new residential areas, property owners could pay, as part of the contract when buying the property, a fee for upkeep of roads and parks in the vicinity.

While this is not an exhaustive listing of some of the rearrangements of government power that would come about in a free market society, it nonetheless serves to give one an idea of the extent to which Rand's ideas might change our political and economic institutions. Indeed, this program makes present-day talk of belt-tightening and prioritization

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Since this economic power is acquired without force, government intervention is not justified. Furthermore, if certain businesses collude to fix prices, they are only exercising freedom of speech. If consumers do not approve of such arrangements, they can seek the products of other firms. Finally, the market itself regulates those who "gouge" consumers. As the profits of the "gougers" get higher, more firms are attracted to the market, thus reducing profits and prices over the long term.

seem insignificant in comparison.

Thus, the rational man must seek arrangements in society that allow each man to exercise his full economic powers, and to be responsible for them, ensuring that his interests are such that they do not lead to an infringement on the rights of others to pursue their own interests. This arrangement, one sees, puts strict limits on political power, the power of force and the collective, while allowing full range to economic power, the power of peaceful persuasion and mutual consent. With these arrangements, rational men can live together in an absence of conflict, provided that unlimited government power, which is the real source of conflict today, is limited to retaliatory use only. But for the present power of the state to blur and erase property boundaries, Rand holds that a situation of good will and prosperity would be the norm today, and not an exception.

## 6.2 FINANCING A RATIONAL GOVERNMENT

Despite the fact that, under Rand's political system, the state would be limited constitutionally to the provision of the police, the armed forces, and the judiciary, this still leaves open the question of how to finance the state's machinery. When Rand regards theft as being immoral, because it constitutes a deprivation of one's right to property, she concludes that taxation is also immoral, because it is the theft, by the state, of the property of the citizenry. Thus,



Rand's task is to show how one can finance a limited government without resorting to taxation.

If one is not to have taxation or any other means of financing government expenditure in an immoral manner, one sees that, first of all, government must be very limited, for the citizenry is not likely to give exorbitant amounts of his income away voluntarily.

Rand did not, however, write extensively on this matter. The finer details of her proposal she leaves to future thinkers. For now, she defines her task as to: "...establish the nature of the principle [of voluntary government financing] and demonstrate that it is practicable."<sup>183</sup>

Of all the rights that government protects, the right to property is the most obvious one. Since property is exchanged quite regularly in a capitalist society, involving a good many contracts and agreements, Rand argues that the rational man should wish to have these contracts protected, and be willing to pay for it. Since most contracts involve credit transactions, the makers of the contract would agree to pay a fee to the state, based on the amount of the transaction, (likely only a small percentage considering the magnitude of what is being paid for here) to pay for court costs and the costs of police services should there be a breach of contract by any of the parties involved. Such a fee would be insurance, insurance that the parties involved

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<sup>183</sup> VOS, p. 116.

would live up to the terms of the contract. In event that the contract was violated, the state would employ retaliatory force, on behalf of the plaintiff, to force the aggressor to make good on his part of the deal. This fee or insurance premium would not amount to a tax because the parties involved would not be compelled to pay it. Persons who did not wish to insure their credit transactions would not have to; but if their contract was not fulfilled by the other party, they would have to face the fact that they would not be able to seek redress. They would consent, in fact, to the possibility of the loss of legal protection for their contract.<sup>184</sup> As the state would hold a monopoly on retaliatory force, they would be barred from retaliating on their own. Perhaps, though, they could pay the legal system a lump sum to handle their case. As to the mechanics of collecting such fees, Rand said nothing of this. However, one supposes that it could be collected monthly or annually, by an appropriate arm of the court system. Either way would matter little.

But what of criminal offenses? Should these require insurance premiums as well, such that those who did not or could not afford to pay them would be at the mercy of any criminal elements? Rand contends that this would not have to be the case. Instead, she holds that such services would be provided to anyone who needs them. This is because it is in everyone's interest, especially those who have property to

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., pp. 116-118.

protect and engage in credit transactions to exchange it, to have any and all criminals apprehended and brought to justice; if they are not, they are as much a threat to property holders as anyone else. Non-contributors to the justice system, of course, get a benefit for no payment, but Rand reasons that this is no sacrifice on the part of those who pay for the system. In fact, they get exactly what they are paying for. They pay to have violators of property rights dealt with; if they are going to be dealt with effectively, they must be brought to justice in all cases.<sup>185</sup>

As for the implementation of voluntary government financing, it is worth noting that such a move would probably be the last step on the way to economic freedom. It is more likely that items like a balanced budget, privatisation and deregulation would be sought after first, before such a plan was even considered. By this, budget deficits could be eliminated to ensure that such voluntary payments were not unbearable. But the fact remains that Rand's idea here is in need of much more development for it to become a topic for sustained consideration.

In addition to voluntary financing of government, Rand has also suggested that government services could be paid for by means of a lottery, but this would not seem to be very workable in a society where anyone could legally run a lottery. Today, the only reason that the state can get large

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid., pp. 116-117.

amounts of revenue from lotteries is that it holds a coercive monopoly on them. In a free society, because of competition, prizes and ticket sales would likely be substantially less than they are now, and perhaps thus not much of a big money-raiser for the state. Despite this, Rand's other ideas on financing government merit consideration.<sup>186</sup>

### 6.3 ATTILA VS. THE WITCH DOCTOR

One of Rand's more noteworthy analyses of the current political situation centers on two figures whom she terms Attila and the Witch Doctor. She uses these figures to illustrate what she maintains is wrong with today's political scene. As is obvious, Rand is deeply dissatisfied with the state of the world today. Because, she believes, the dominant culture has accepted so thoroughly the doctrine that man must live for his neighbors, it accepts quite readily the doctrine of statism, or the notion that man must live for and serve the state. Thus, when man chooses to accept the dominance of the state over his life, all he has left is to choose which statist is going to lead him. Statism usually has two faces in this context: statism by faith, and statism by force. The former Rand symbolizes by the figure of the Witch Doctor, the latter by that of the Hun war-lord Attila. Often, one gets some mixture of these two forces. Statism by faith assumes political guidance by appeal to some god; statism by force looks to what it perceives as the will of the

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

master race, or proletariat, or majority or tyrant for political guidance. These two faces Rand opposes to her guides for a rational political system: reason and freedom. For most of history, Rand relates, men chose to be guided politically by faith, but this has lost most of its former appeal because:

No man or mystical elite can hold a whole society subjugated to their arbitrary assertions, edicts and whims, without the use of force.<sup>187</sup>

Despite this, men often replace statism by faith not with reason and freedom, but with just another variation of the same theme: statism by force. Thus, rule by a religious elite is replaced by a dictator or the whims of the majority. Men's choices often vacillate between Attila, the man of force who rules by outright physical coercion, and the Witch Doctor, the man who rules by means of appeals for guidance to an unknowable world, and who keeps his subjects obedient by threats of supernatural disaster. For most of history, men have been ruled by variations and mixtures of these two tyrannies.<sup>188</sup> Mankind, unfortunately, has rarely been aware of the alternative of reason and freedom.

Attila, Rand writes, was interested primarily in physical conquest, viewing men as cattle, using might as his standard of right. His purpose was to loot, steal and not to produce. The Witch Doctor, alternatively, was interested in the con-

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<sup>187</sup> P:WNI, p. 70.

<sup>188</sup> FTNI, pp. 14-15.

quest of mens' minds, taking his emotions as primaries, and asserting the primacy of consciousness. He offered men a morality that Attila could not, but by divorcing that morality from reason, the Witch Doctor became an aid to Attila. With a morality of unreason, Attila found that he could rationalize his actions, and feel justified about them, while at the same time the Witch Doctor found Attila useful in outrightly forcing rational men to obey the Witch Doctor's dictates. As Rand says:

Attila turns man's life on earth into a living hell--the Witch Doctor tells them that it could not be otherwise.<sup>189</sup>

Together, Rand contends, these two forces have waged a long battle against the thinkers and the producers (capitalism). Whenever capitalism and freedom asserted itself, Attila and the Witch Doctor shrank back in fear. Today, however, these two destructive forces are again reasserting themselves on the political scene. Where, one might ask? Rand advises us to look at the political left (Jane Fonda et al), and at the so-called religious "right" (Jerry Falwell). The former are mystics of the muscle, the latter mystics of the mind. While both seem to be opposed to each other superficially, she notes that they are linked by their explicitly statist ideology, the only difference between them being which areas of man's life they see fit for intrusion by the state. Rand laments that this seems to be, unfortunately, the choice offered to today's citizen when he

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

goes to vote, a choice that maximizes conflict in society no matter which side one takes.

One issue that can be raised at this point is that of Rand's frequent use of stark dichotomies in her works. Here we have Attila or the Witch Doctor, and earlier we have seen reason or faith, capitalism or statism, and so on. She sees many issues as having, in terms of fundamental principles, no middle way. Again, she does see room for compromise in human affairs, but only in regards to minor details. The Golden Mean she sees as an inadequate rule for major principles.<sup>190</sup> This is probably due to her conviction that human freedom requires a very specific political and economic system, and that anything less is a fatal mistake. Lenin, a consistent ideologist himself, recognized this point:

How true it is that a little mistake can always be turned into a monstrous one if it is persisted in, if profound reasons are given for it, and if it is driven to its "logical conclusion".<sup>191</sup>

What is vital to remember here is that Rand's Attila and the Witch Doctor are not meant to be taken literally. Rather, they are archetypes or (rather vibrant) metaphors, representing trends in history rather than specific personalities. Thus, Rand should not be interpreted as believing that Jane Fonda is plotting to invade Europe, or that Jerry Falwell wears grotesque headresses and dances about stone

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<sup>190</sup> See Chapter Seven of this thesis for a more detailed discussion of the Golden Mean.

<sup>191</sup> The Essentials of Lenin, p. 589.

idols. Rather, Attila is simply a metaphor for the forceful side of statist ideology, while the Witch Doctor represents the mystic, near-religious aura of state-worship. While these metaphors are rather colourful, one must admit though that they are hardly a workable basis for a precise analysis of the political spectrum. Much more useful categories exist which Rand would have done better using instead.

#### 6.4 POLITICAL CONFLICT

To bolster her case that government controls encourage conflict in today's society, Ayn Rand looks at some phenomena, exacerbated by the welfare state, that are indicative of the kind of conflict one sees today. Under her system of radical capitalism, Rand contends that such conflicts would not be significant because the welfare state that encourages them would be brought to an end.

One phenomenon of conflict that Rand looks at in some detail is the issue of pressure-group warfare. In this type of situation, the government awards special rights to some citizens at the expense of the rights of others. Since the welfare state essentially throws as much property into one common lot as it sees fit, and then divides it up later, this does nothing but encourage a mad rush to see who can get what, before someone else does. The groups that got there first, or gained the favour of the government officials doing the redistributing, are looked upon as enemies



by those who did not cultivate the favour of the government first. Since this type of race views wealth as a static quantity waiting to be divided up, and takes desires as primaries, then anyone's gain must be seen as another's loss. Society becomes a tangle of warring special interest lobbies, fighting to see if they can either at least get back what was taken from them in the first place, or if they can acquire some goods free of charge. Since need and desire is the standard of such redistribution, there is little if any way of objectively distributing such wealth. Usually, the group with the biggest numbers (votes) gets most of the benefits. The lone individual, not being part of any group, usually pays much more than he gets back. His only alternative is either to put up with his lot in society, or become part of a group. Thus, society is split into all sorts of conflicting groups, a phenomenon Rand terms as "tribalism".<sup>192</sup> The tribe becomes the major mode of social organization, and each tribe comes to regard the next as a legitimate object of plunder. Indeed, when one looks at the political scene today, one can see many modern tribes: labour unions, business groups, farmers, women, government employees, minority groups, and so on, all of whom are bat-

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<sup>192</sup> Indeed, this phenomenon can be seen in international affairs today: many modern states are presently at unremitting war with each other for little or no good reason, as a result of their often being governed by lunatics with no grasp of reason. (e.g., Iran and Iraq) While Rand has no trouble with the fact of diversity amongst nation-states or the groups within them, her point is that this diversity should not be a source of conflict between them.

ting to get what they can out of a government that is less interested in production than it is in supervising redistribution. When an economy is ordered in this way, where everyone's desires have equal validity, then one man's right to property is as good as another man's "right" to steal it. Labouring under such incredible contradictions and ceaseless demands for more redistribution, it is small wonder that conflict such as this erupts in a mixed economy. But the culprit here is not capitalism; it is the increasingly statist mixed economy that is obliterating it. Rand states:

In a mixed economy [civil war] takes the form of pressure-group warfare, [with] each group fighting for legislation to extort its own advantages by force from all other groups.<sup>193</sup>

Furthermore, Rand contends that contemporary talk of making the bureaucracy more accountable to avoid such conflict misses the point of the matter. The government bureaucracy doing the redistributing, Rand points out, cannot achieve any objectivity, no matter whether or not one puts the "right" people in charge. Such people cannot possibly be completely honest or just if they have been granted wide, non-objective powers to control society. Every decision they make will always benefit one group unjustly, while denying benefits to another. The bureaucracy is guided only by the will of the majority, by mere consensus, and not by principles. Truth in this context is a matter of numbers, a question of whose group is bigger.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> C:TUI, p. 37.

If a society is characterized by this kind of conflict arising from the contradictions of the mixed economy, as it is today, the response of politicians is often not to appeal to principles and question the desirability of the mixed economy, but to try to seek peace by appeasing as many groups as possible. Invariably though, the politician can please no one by this method. Whomever he favours will always feel that they should have gotten more, while whoever loses is also, obviously, displeased. The only solution Rand sees is to simply end the spectacle of pressure-group warfare by taking away the right of the state to spend unearned money. Only in this way can such conflict be eliminated.<sup>195</sup>

Racism and xenophobia are two other examples of conflict that Rand sees as exacerbated by the welfare state society. Under a mixed economy, loyalties of individuals become oriented towards the group, since it is only in greater numbers that one can get more from the state. Society comes to be dominated more by the rule of groups of men than by the rule of ideas or objective law. While the group does offer the individual protection from the welfare state, defending him without question against other groups, the group also comes to dictate to the individual how he is to run his life. The group, then, comes to fear outsiders:

The word 'outsiders', to [the group member], means the whole wide world beyond the confines of his village or town or gang--the world of all those

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid., pp. 202-235.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., pp. 167-172.

who do not live by his 'rules'.<sup>196</sup>

The group, province or nation comes to fear and hate outsiders because in a statist, statically-oriented economy, one more group is not an addition to a nation's productive capacity, but a burden on those who already live there; another deletion from the ever-shrinking amount of a statist economy's resources, meaning less for the people already in the group. In terms of xenophobia, one sees in Canada a hatred for American investment (fewer opportunities for Canadians); in terms of racism, one sees quite clearly the hatred of immigrants who are not part of the dominant racial group, and who therefore are looked upon as another burden on an economy that cannot provide for the people already there. Rand sums up her case as follows:

The rise of the welfare state [breaks up a] country into pressure groups, each fighting for special privileges at the expense of others--so that an individual unaffiliated with any group becomes fair trade for tribal predators.<sup>197</sup>

In regards to an example of outright conflict, like war, Rand would argue that again the problem is the rise of statist governments on a worldwide scale. Having ground their own economies to a halt, these governments look towards other nations as objects of plunder, due to the fact that they do not see how wealth can and must be produced and not simply stolen. Of course, Rand would not say that all nations

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<sup>196</sup> P:WNI, p. 41.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

are equally evil in this respect. Some are more statist than others, and therefore are more inclined to international thievery. She would treat the latter governments as criminals, and admit that they might be rightly punished by more moral governments, governments that respect, to some degree anyway, their citizens' property rights. Rand would consider such nations as the United States, Canada, Japan and those of western Europe to be moral, and therefore as justified in retaliating against nations that deny their citizens' foundational rights, such as the Soviet Union, China, the states of Eastern Europe, and most of Africa and the Middle East. In Rand's view, conflict will not cease until the governments of such outlaw nations are dealt with and their citizen's rights reinstated. She would not see that a solution to war is simply to tolerate such nations. As far as she is concerned, peace will only come in a lasting way when radical capitalism is the ruling ideology of the entire world. As Rand says:

A nation that violates the rights of its own citizens cannot claim any rights whatsoever.... Dictatorship nations are outlaws. Any free nation had the right to invade Nazi Germany, and, today, has the right to invade...any...slave pen. Whether a free nation chooses to do so is a matter of its own self-interest.... It is not a free nation's duty to liberate other nations at the price of self-sacrifice, but a free nation has the right to do so, when and if it so chooses.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> VOS, pp. 103-104.

With regard to conflict in society, Rand's observations seem quite pertinent here. The anger directed at other nations that are not immoral or irrational, or against immigrants, is indicative of the viewpoint prevalent now that new members of the group are only one more burden on a nation's apparently limited resources. When production is seen as useless, any extra weight is seen as a net drain on the resources of the nation. The solution, as Rand sees it, is to emphasize production, not redistribution, so as to make the sum of a nation's wealth increase, to make more for more people. Then, any extras would be seen not as a burden, but as an asset in increasing production. But this situation will only occur when the welfare state that creates so many conflicts among men today is done away with.

#### 6.5 CONSERVATISM AND LIBERALISM

Another of Rand's more interesting observations regarding the modern political scene is her analysis of the two dominant political camps of the day: the liberals and the conservatives. In her view, just as man today is confronted with many false, conflicting choices in epistemology and ethics, like mind or body, emotions or logic, practicality or morality, he has, in politics, two bad choices as well: is the nation to be led by the liberals, or by the conservatives? As she sees it, like Attila and the Witch Doctor, these two ideologies are flawed because they are only variants of altruism and statism. Rand was more inclined,

because of her economic beliefs, towards the conservative side of the political spectrum, but she was still no friend of modern conservatism. Simultaneously, she admired the liberals' respect for intellectual values, but again disliked their political programs intensely.

Rand wrote in her discussion on the nature of compromise that any compromise on basic principles is equivalent to a sellout. As she sees it, the political arena today is dominated by the willingness to compromise on any issue, with the conservatives being no exception to that trend. However, as Rand had mentioned, in any agreement on basic principles, the most consistent side wins out. Today, conservatism compromises with liberalism by accepting altruism as a guiding moral principle. Then, the former try to defend capitalism on the basis of that morality. Inevitably, conservatives rarely succeed in their task, and succeed even less when it comes to winning elections. By trying to defend a social system based on rational self-interest on altruistic terms, conservatives appear unclear, inconsistent and confused about their beliefs. The liberal, on the other hand, is more a defender of altruism and therefore is more consistent and lucid in his attacks on capitalism. His premises conflict much, much less than those of a conservative, so he can make a much more consistent and credible case for his point of view. Because consistency and coherency are more credible than confusion, Rand sees it as little surprise that liber-

als win more elections than conservatives.<sup>199</sup> The conservative, because of his upholding of a political system that conflicts directly with his moral premises, comes to look like a charlatan. He promotes freedom based on rational self-interest, while at the same time denigrating self-interest, in the vain hope that no one will notice. Rand says of this approach:

What is the rationality of those who expect to trick people into freedom, cheat them into justice, fool them into progress, con them into preserving their rights....<sup>200</sup>

[The conservatives] have no goals, no direction, no political principles, no social ideals, no intellectual values, no leadership to offer anyone.<sup>201</sup>

Rand observes that conservatism often uses three fallacious arguments to defend capitalism: the argument from faith, the argument from tradition, and the argument from depravity. The argument from faith holds that capitalism is the moral system because god decrees it. Of course, Rand disagrees because she holds that faith is not a valid means of knowledge, and therefore it cannot be used to justify

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<sup>199</sup> For an excellent example of an attempt to defend capitalism on altruistic terms, see George Gilder, Wealth and Poverty, (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), pp. 23-42.

<sup>200</sup> C:TUI, p. 194.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., p. 195. Despite the fact that such denunciations may have validity, Rand might have won herself more intellectual support had she not been so vehement towards other thinkers who did not totally agree with her views, and so quick to condemn them. Rand might have carved a larger place for herself in philosophy if she, instead of concentrating almost exclusively on a thinker's faults, had remarked on some of their good points as well.



capitalism. Tradition is also often used to justify capitalism, on the grounds that if something worked in the past, one should do it again. However, it is the case that capitalism did not always work well in the past, because it was hobbled by remnants of mercantilism and feudalism. To return to this state of affairs without some adjustments would only be to repeat the same mistake twice. Finally, it is argued that freedom is necessary because men are too depraved to be trusted to run society as dictators, implying, Rand notes, that if men were good they would deserve a dictatorship!<sup>202</sup>

Thus, conservatism and liberalism generally agree that altruism is the proper moral base for a political system, and that statism is an acceptable political ideal. They disagree, essentially, only on the extent to which a nation should accept statism. The conservatives argue for less state intervention, the liberals for more, while both agree that some statism is fine. This split is no more evident, Rand finds, than in the current debate over censorship. In this debate, Rand sees the conservatives and liberals offering different varieties of the same statist medicine. The conservatives tend to desire freedom economically and materially, but regard the mind, the intellect, as properly subject to state controls. Hence, their upholding of anti-pornography laws. The liberals, on the other hand, are against censorship of intellectual and spiritual matters, but then consign material and economic concerns to the

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid., pp. 196-201.

authority of the state, for possible censorship of one's economic dreams. Rand states this contrast rather succinctly:

The conservatives see man as a body freely roaming the earth, building sand piles or factories--with an electronic computer inside his skull, controlled from Washington. The liberals see man as a soul freewheeling to the farthest reaches to the universe--but wearing chains from nose to toes when he crosses the street to buy a loaf of bread.<sup>203</sup>

Each camp wants to control the realm it regards as metaphysically important;...The conservatives want to rule man's consciousness; the liberals, his body.<sup>204</sup>

Another important phenomenon regarding liberalism and conservatism, Rand notes, is the rejection of extremes of ideology by both camps. Liberals tend to reject extreme socialism, while conservatives reject what is termed the extreme right, allegedly fascism. Both camps, then, see the political spectrum as moving from extreme communism on one hand, to extreme fascism on the other. Both are thus tempted to stay in the middle, with the conservatives slightly off to the right. Rand holds that this model of the political spectrum as circular is fundamentally flawed. The labels of extreme right and extreme left she believes to be more confusing than helpful. Indeed, if one looks at modern South Africa, one can see Rand's point. In South Africa, what is called the extreme right stands for extreme racialism and apartheid; the political left, for extreme non-racialism and

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<sup>203</sup> P:WNI, p. 187.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., p. 187.

the end of apartheid. Now, no one would logically say, if they were interested in racial harmony in South Africa, that one ought to follow the middle path in politics there. This would entail being half in favour of apartheid, and half not. Alternatively, Rand suggests a political spectrum that is a straight line, starting with extreme freedom (capitalism) on one end, and extreme unfreedom (communism or fascism) on the other. By this model, one sees the liberals and conservatives aligned near the center, somewhere between collectivism and individualism, moving towards tyranny and away from freedom.

By moving constantly to the political center, Rand contends that the conservatives are moving away from individualism, not enhancing it. According to Rand, extremism is not impractical and improper as such, but must be put into a proper context. As she says:

Are an extreme of health and an extreme of disease undesirable? Are extreme intelligence and extreme stupidity...equally unworthy?<sup>205</sup>

The rejection of extremes, Rand contends, is only a ploy to reject capitalism (extreme freedom), a position that conservatives, she recommends, ought to avoid. Conservatives, in this way, have given in to collectivism, and have helped to make the dominant political issue not capitalism versus statism, but communism versus fascism, a recipe for conflict and chaos. What one is left with, Rand writes, is:

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<sup>205</sup> C:TUI, p. 178.

A 'moderate' amount of freedom and a 'moderate' amount of slavery--with a 'moderate' amount of justice and a 'moderate' amount of injustice....<sup>206</sup>

Economically, a push to the political center, or, in Rand's terms, half-way to communism, is the result of the growth of what she has described here as the mixed economy, a society characterized both by free enterprise and by state control and ownership. But following from her contention that a political ideology that compromises on basic principles is inherently unstable, the economy that compromises on its basic principles is unstable as well. She contends that a mixed economy cannot stay that way for long; if the principle of statism that underlies the mixed economy is not challenged, it may carry itself, given enough time and no principled opposition, to its logical conclusion: total statism. The reason is that in the absence of a challenge, in principle, to statism, there is nothing left to stop such a trend. When all political groups today accept statism in principle, and argue only over minor details, the most consistent statist will win, because they will have the most consistent arguments. For instance, if one has two politicians who, like the conservatives and the liberals, accept that the individual owes his life to the state, and who then argue merely over the degree of state control, who would one vote for? Obviously, major principles are not the issue; in both cases they are identical. The only basis for choice

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid., p. 181.

left is whose case for statism is more lucid and consistent. As discussed before, the political left will usually be the winner here. When one accepts that, say, a minor portion of one's property is subject to expropriation, what is there to stop its total seizure? An appeal to "fairness"? A plea not to go to extremes? Such complaints, one fears, would likely be dismissed rather quickly. Whether this process takes five years or five hundred makes little difference. As Rand argues:

But since men have to act so long as they live...[a society of moral and political mediocrity] is ready to be taken over by anyone willing to set its direction. The initiative can come from only two types of men: either the man who is willing to assume the responsibility of asserting rational values-- or from the thug who is not troubled by questions of responsibility.<sup>207</sup>

As evidence of this trend today, one cannot ignore the fact that the state's share of any Western nation's GNP has grown massively in this century, and shows no signs of reversing its growth at any particular point. Furthermore, in every economic crisis this century, the response of Western governments has not been to end controls and regulations on individual freedom, but to increase them.<sup>208</sup> Thus, the mix between controls and freedom is a volatile one that could lead to the end of freedom if statism is not challenged consistently and in principle.

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<sup>207</sup> VOS, p. 74.

<sup>208</sup> For an excellent discussion of the manner in which the mixed economy can lead to total statism, see Leonard Peikoff's The Ominous Parallels.

Ayn Rand argues that in order to redeem freedom and the free-enterprise system, the defenders of such a system must put a stop to compromising the basic ideals that could make capitalism a reality. As she says of her personal stance:

We are radicals for capitalism. We are fighting for that philosophical base which capitalism did not have and without which it was doomed to perish.<sup>209</sup>

It bears repeating here that Rand maintains that one can only defend capitalism effectively from a basis of ethical egoism, realizing the need for a rational morality in man's life and in his institutions of government. Rand does not advocate, though, blanket approval for any kind of extremism whatsoever. She advocates radicalism in the defense of rational principles, not in defense of whims. She realizes that her political ideas can never be implemented by violent means; it will have to be done by means of persuasion, for people will, quite correctly, never accept what they do not understand. In other words, you cannot force people to be free. As long as non-violent avenues for change are still open to persons who wish to change the system, at this point there is no justification for the use of violence to promote Rand's ideas. They will have to be spread by means of free interchange amongst consenting individuals. The task of promoting the ideas of rational self-interest and economic liberty will not be easy, but the basic approach is to influence people by means of logical argumentation, as long

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<sup>209</sup> C:TUI, p. 181.

as such an avenue is still open. The medium of such an approach (books, clubs, articles, political action, free-market think-tanks, and so on) is virtually limitless and up to individual choice. In the meantime, it is no doubt true that significant intellectual obstacles lie in the path of Rand's ideas, but this is no reason to give up a struggle for freedom. One may note that Marxism faced these same kinds of challenges, but it did not by any means give up its struggle, and in the end succeeded. Such approaches, as well, need not involve giving up or compromising one's basic principles. One is often forced by political reality to deal with and participate in some rather unsavory, by Rand's standards, institutions (i.e. medicare),<sup>210</sup> but the key is to never grant one's moral sanction to such anti-freedom institutions. As Rand says: "Judge, and be prepared to be judged."<sup>211</sup> As far as Rand was concerned, this was the essence of, and most practical approach to, living a rational life in a quite irrational world. The success or failure of political change ultimately rests on the strength of one's convictions. Without strong convictions, a case for freedom is made much weaker, and political change becomes more difficult. Rand's main contribution to this task was to develop and/or enhance the basic principles upon which economic freedom is founded. By this, she did advocates of eco-

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<sup>210</sup> The reasoning here is that, unless one is very rich, one has no choice about paying for medicare, and it would be foolish not to use such services. Rand realized that her philosophy would hardly be served by mass martyrdom.

<sup>211</sup> VOS, p. 72.

conomic liberty an enormous favour.

Even so, at this point in time it is far too early to say that Rand's ideas are guaranteed success, although one can say that they are not necessarily guaranteed failure either. With the recent favourable response being given free-market institutions throughout the world, it is safe to say that Rand's ideas at least have the possibility of success.

As Rand sees the political situation today, the rational man is faced with choices that do not bode well for him. Conflict is the rule, with everyone being forced to act like predatory animals by the welfare state, and no one seems able to do anything to stop such destruction. None of the dominant political camps offers man a worthwhile defense of reason, or rational self-interest, or of capitalism. They seem completely uninterested in challenging the welfare state in principle and thereby put a stop to its conflicts. They see little or no need for putting in place a proper environment in which the rational mind can function. Instead, they develop policies and institutions which give license to irrationality and conflict. For this reason, Rand sees it as no surprise that people today are so cynical and disgusted with politics and politicians; politicians continually endorse contradictory political ideas, miring civilization deeper and deeper into chaos. For Rand, this was and remains a disheartening spectacle for a defender of capitalism. But she held out her philosophy in the hope that, one day, it might be different.



## 6.6 EXAMPLES OF CONFLICT

Before leaving the chapter of this thesis on Rand's politics, one can offer some present-day examples of conflict in order to concretize what Rand means when she contends that the major cause of conflict between men today is government interference in the lives of a citizenry. To illustrate her point here, let us look at one government policy that has been tremendously abusive of individual rights, and thus conducive to conflict. Conversely, we will also examine one other government policy that restores, to some degree, individual rights and is thus exemplary of the kinds of policies that can lessen conflict in contemporary society. It is important to remember here that such examples are selected not for a discussion of the issue for its own sake, but rather to illustrate a specific principle. For that reason, many unnecessary details of such events or policies are omitted.

One major example of a government policy that creates conflict when acted upon is the setting-up of state-owned enterprises. Despite the intentions of the persons who advocate such policies, they leave unanswered two basic questions: who will pay for such entities, and who will control them? By dealing with these questions, one can understand why the idea of state ownership of industry and other productive enterprises necessarily creates contradictions and therefore conflicts in society.

With regards to the first question, will the people who pay for the acquisition of such entities be, in every case, either interested in owning them, or a direct beneficiary of their activity? The answer is, of course, no. When the state forces all its citizens to pay taxes to support a state-owned body, a body that could otherwise be privately owned, it assumes falsely that everybody agrees with such an objective. Certainly, many people will not. After all, it is difficult to see what benefits a resident of Manitoba will gain from owning an aircraft factory in Quebec, especially since he gets no dividends from its operations if the state owns it. Such persons would often prefer to have their money back and spend it on other items of more interest to them. The advocates of state-ownership of industry are obligated to come up with a moral argument that states why such an individual should not have his money back. This is an argument that few such persons care to make.

But the real conflict comes into play when deciding who will control the activities of state-owned enterprises. Under a policy of this nature, all citizens are owners of the entity in question, and all must necessarily be seen as having a right to control its activities. Yet how is one to fairly accommodate the vastly differing, and often contradictory, preferences, desires and interests of all the citizens of an entire country? The answer is that such conflicts cannot be resolved; they can only be pushed aside by simply

submerging the interests and desires of the minority by force. This issue cannot be "resolved" except by flagrantly abusing individual rights and freedom of choice. If the solution offered is to allow the citizenry to delegate their authority to a few representatives, then what happens to the minority who lose the vote? Why do their preferences have to be submerged simply because they happen to disagree with everyone else?

If the solution is to appoint a regulatory board to supervise the state-owned enterprise, and then have the public "lobby" the board to inject their preferences into the system, what will happen to those who have neither the time nor the money nor the public relations firms to state their preferences? Again, the interests of a minority are constantly submerged by this process, even though that minority pays the costs of the enterprise as much as anyone else. The result of such a process is not one of peaceful interaction, but of a dire scramble to see who can get the attention of the state first, before someone else gets to decide how your money will be spent. Because of the collective nature of such decisions, there is really no way to deal with all viewpoints fairly; the only result is conflict since a few will give the orders, and many will pay the bills, like it or not.

But when property is held privately, the individual who does not agree with others has an outlet where he can pursue

his interests on his own. In the free market, those who do want property are free to acquire it by their own means. They do not have the right to force others to pay for their desires. Under such a social system, conflict is unnecessary because all parties have a right to their own lives, time and property, and can part company amicably if they do not agree on common courses of action.

If one were to be able to find a government policy that today is increasing the chances for political harmony, that policy would be free trade. Of course, the present Free Trade Agreement will only lessen to a small degree the chances of conflicts amongst Canadians, for it does not totally eliminate the welfare state itself. For the purposes of this example, we will look at the basic principles behind free trade, and then at a few issues covered by the present Agreement.

In principle, a policy of free trade recognizes that all individuals in a given society have differing goals, interests, and preferences, and that the state has no moral right to prevent any individual from pursuing his happiness in a rational manner. If such pursuits require trade with citizens of other nations, then the state has no moral right to interfere if this activity is not carried out at the expense of others. If "others" claim that trade with the U.S.A. should be restricted on the basis that they "desire" a captive market for their products, then such claims are invalid

per se. Governments cannot base policy on desires and whims.

Anti-free traders often act as if a move to free trade is some attempt to force them to trade with the United States. Individuals living in a society of free trade are still free not to trade with the U.S. if they do not want to. The relevant point here is that simply because you personally do not want to trade with the U.S. does not mean that everyone else agrees. Furthermore, those who wish to restrict trade with the United States are obligated to answer this question: If I trade with the United States, what will I have done wrong? Will I have been dishonest, or a thief? Surely, I may have frustrated the desires of certain people to be given a captive market for their products, but is frustration of desires grounds for putting someone in jail? Why then, do such persons insist on erecting contrived, artificial barriers to trade amongst Canadians and Americans and then make or threaten to make criminals out of those who break such barriers? What is morally wrong with wanting to trade with your fellow men?

With regards to the present Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, while it does not go nearly far enough in allowing individuals the freedom they deserve, certain items of the pact allow far more freedom to individuals than before. Presently, we will look at a few of the more significant items, but one must keep in mind that a brief review is all that is possible here.

The provisions of the pact covering energy are particularly interesting with regards to freedom for individuals. In short, the pact liberalizes the rules governing Canadian energy exports to the U.S. Groundless paranoia about Canada running out of energy aside (only governments create shortages, not the free market), if any person wants to hoard energy in case of a shortage, then the free market has a mechanism whereby he can satisfy such desires without conflict with others: he can buy up oil and gas leases with his own money, and then absorb the impact of those lost sales at his own expense.

In the area of investment, the present Agreement promises still more freedom for individuals, by significantly liberalizing the rules for foreign investment. As for critics of such an item, it would be interesting to hear them state on which grounds they believe that privately-held Canadian property is somehow under the control of the state or the collective, and that therefore the state has the right to control who owns it. In any case, the free market allows such nationalists a quite reasonable avenue for ensuring that Canadian industry stays Canadian: they can buy such industries, at their own expense. Once again, there is nothing immoral or improper about frustrating the "desires" of Canadian nationalists to see all property owned by Canadians. In fact, every individual property holder has a moral right to dispose of his property to whoever he wants, wheth-

er the buyer be Canadian or American. The fact that this particular pact does not allow Canadians identical freedom to invest in America is beside the point; simply because one nation wishes to treat its citizens like cattle does not mean we should do the same.

Granted, this is only a brief look at the issue of free trade. Still, it is worth noting that any move to free trade at all is very conducive to the cause of economic liberty. Moves to free trade are significant in that they allow individuals more freedom to pursue their interests in such a manner that these pursuits do not have to conflict with those of others. In this manner, free trade may help to limit conflicts in politics.

In the sphere of deregulation of the economy, some of Rand's insights into the broadcasting industry offer possible approaches to bringing about a laissez-faire state. In this case, Rand argues that there is no need for the kind of extensive regulation of broadcasting that one presently sees. She argues analogously that both a concert pianist and a TV station are broadcasters; the one minor difference being that one broadcasts over a much larger area. Rand notes that since a concert pianist does not need to be licensed, why should a TV or radio station have to be?

Rand's solution to this problem is to have the state act not as a controller of the content of the airwaves, but

rather as an agent which defines only the particular channel or radio band over which one is allowed to broadcast. The state should be: "a traffic policeman who protects the rights of broadcasters from technical interference."<sup>212</sup>

The problem with having the state determine the content of broadcasts is that the regulators have to, theoretically, accomodate all views of all citizens who are, by this standard, supposed to own the airwaves. But what really occurs is that those with the time and money to lobby the regulators will get their views accomodated, while ordinary citizens, lacking such resources, have to effectively submerge their views.

In turning broadcasting over to the free market, Rand argues that TV and radio frequencies be sold to the highest bidder. However, one could also argue that such frequencies be handed out on a first-come, first-served basis, and that present TV and radio stations be allowed to retain their frequencies, since they have already heavily invested in them. The one condition that might be placed on broadcasters is that they at least broadcast something to ensure that they are using their property.

Overall, what is broadcast should be a matter for broadcasters and their patrons to decide. If you do not enjoy a particular show, the free market allows you to register your disapproval by turning it off. Under the present restricted

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<sup>212</sup> C:TUI p. 126.



market, there is often so little choice in radio and TV that this option cannot be exercised as readily.

One can note that such statements apply quite well to Canada, where we have guidelines for Canadian content in broadcasting, supposedly to enhance Canadian culture in addition to the usual regulations. However, the free market offers a quite adequate avenue for the support of Canadian culture without government controls: support such culturally relevant shows with your own time and money. Simply because one may happen to enjoy such shows does not mean that everyone else does. Thus, others should be allowed this same freedom of choice too.

Thus, while this is not an exhaustive listing of examples of conflict caused by government intervention in the economy, one can see how government policies, past and present, in the name of paternalism, nationalism, or the welfare state, have led to enormous and unnecessary conflict in society. But with a free-market approach to government policy, this kind of conflict can be eliminated. As a result, men can achieve a political environment under which all are free to agree or disagree, associate or disassociate, and under which all can pursue their interests in a harmonious and rational manner in an absence of conflict. Needless to say, there could still be conflict caused by irrational people. But they would be a distinct minority, and a minority barred from using government to force their dictates on oth-

ers and hence make discord and conflict common occurrences. With a free-market approach to politics, political harmony is thus a real possibility.

## Chapter VII

### RAND'S VIEW OF HISTORY

We now turn to Ayn Rand's view of history, since her perspectives on this matter highlight the fundamentals of her philosophy in many ways. Rand sees history not as the inescapable progression of predetermined events, but rather as a progression of ideas. It is ideas which make history into what it is, and it is only ideas that can change history. Thus, she holds that man can affect his destiny. Furthermore, since Rand holds philosophical ideas to be at the root of man's condition, she regards these as being the major determinant of historical progress. When man held the proper philosophical ideas, he progressed; when he held the wrong ones, his condition declined. Nonetheless, Rand cannot be considered, in light of the amount she wrote on the subject, a thorough commentator on the history of philosophy. Her contribution to the subject was surprisingly and unfortunately scant.

As Rand sees it, history has been dominated by two basic competing philosophies, which she traces back to ancient Greece. The philosophy of Plato, on one hand, postulated a view of existence with two realities; one an imperfect, illusory world that man perceived, and another higher,

superior realm of abstractions, accessible only by mystic revelation, wherein lay the key to real meaning. Aristotle's philosophy, on the other hand, claimed that there is only one reality, and that man's task is to perceive it, not to create it. Rand lauded Aristotle's metaphysics and epistemology and because of his work in these fields she considered him to be philosophy's greatest figure.<sup>213</sup>

However, it is worth noting that Rand's and Aristotle's philosophies were very different in their ethics and politics. Aristotle attempted a naturalistic ethics, but retained significant amounts of Platonic ideas. Nonetheless, Rand and Aristotle did see ethics as a hierarchy of values, all of which aimed at one supreme goal: for Aristotle eudaimonia; for Rand the life of man qua man. Both held that ethics should be designed for life on this earth, instead of for another realm. They both also held pride as a major virtue.<sup>214</sup>

As mentioned previously in this thesis, Aristotle's use of the Golden Mean as a tool in ethics was something that Rand saw as totally inadequate, since it was simply not applicable to all choices in ethics.

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<sup>213</sup> FTNI, pp. 22-23.

<sup>214</sup> John Morrall, Aristotle, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1977), p. 59.

Furthermore, Aristotle's politics were much less appealing to Rand than his metaphysics, epistemology, or even his ethics. They were mostly a modified Platonic system. Aristotle was undoubtedly less of a collectivist than Plato, but the difference was more a matter of degree than of principle.

However, Aristotle did agree with Rand that what a good political state is should be determined by an observation of this world, and not by reference to revelations.<sup>215</sup>

The purpose of politics, for Aristotle, was to ensure virtuous behaviour on the part of the citizenry, even if force was required to make people behave in a particular manner. He wrote: "...virtue must be the care of the state."<sup>216</sup> Aristotle thus held the common good to be an object of the law: "Legislators make the citizens good by forming good habits in them..."<sup>217</sup> For Rand, the purpose of the state was to protect individual rights, while Aristotle's notion was much more comprehensive, in that the state is not: "mere society...established for the prevention of mutual crime and for the sake of exchange."<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Morrall, pp. 48-49.

<sup>216</sup> McKeon, p. 1188.

<sup>217</sup> McKeon, p. 953.

<sup>218</sup> McKeon, p. 1188.

Aristotle's politics very much derided the elitism of Plato's. The ideal ruler, for Aristotle, did not have to be a philosopher king, but rather: "...the man of phronesis, the possessor of prudence tested by experience, the philosopher of the practical sciences."<sup>219</sup> His preferred state was thus a golden mean between the extremes of oligarchy and democracy. This "polity" could be divided up into three classes: the pure philosophers of wisdom; enlightened practical men, possessing practical ethical insight (likely well-off rural landowners); and the unenlightened masses, such as shopkeepers and businessmen, who have so little insight that they would mostly have to be forced to live virtuously. In Aristotle's view, which Rand would certainly disagree with, the unenlightened masses were generally unfit for ruling, because plenty of leisure was necessary for good political insights; they were simply too busy toiling to think about such complex matters.<sup>220</sup>

For Aristotle, the lesser members of society could not be trusted to be good rulers, for they were too servile, and the elite was simply too domineering. Thus, the middle class would normally be the best rulers. As he said, the middle class was: "least likely to shrink from rule, or to be over-ambitious at it."<sup>221</sup> To avoid rule by the few and rule by the many, Aristotle thus substituted rule by the not-so-

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<sup>219</sup> Morrall, p. 62.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., pp. 66-71.

<sup>221</sup> McKeon, p. 1220.

many.

Thus, while he did admonish Plato for completely submerging the individual in his ideal state, Aristotle did not give the individual too much freedom. He had no systematic conception of individual rights, viewing politics instead as primarily the question of whose group should rule.

Rand would see Aristotle's major mistake as his view that there was something inherently wrong with the ordinary man per se, that made him unfit to rule. Rand, on the other hand, sees the problem with democracy as lying with the intellectuals. The common man is not bad by definition, but then neither is he a leader in intellectual matters. Here he is largely a follower. Thus, if bad ideas are disseminated by intellectuals, the common man will inevitably adopt them and put them into political practice. For this reason, Rand held that there should be strong constitutional protection against any abuses of individual rights, should any such bad ideas predominate. But ultimately, only the intellectuals can truly protect freedom. As we have seen many times before, Rand was not one to regard politics as an art of compromise, but rather as the art of promulgating one's basic principles clearly and consistently.

While Aristotle's philosophy did have a great beginning in its advocacy of living with reality and by reason and logic, and with its emphasis on the individual as opposed to

the collective, his politics did not consistently follow through with this commitment to the individual. Aristotle might have pointed out that he was only being pragmatic in this approach to politics, but Rand would have been quick to point out that simply because political life is very complex and often bewildering in its agglomeration of differing values does not mean that one ought merely to take a mean amongst whatever people happen to value and advocate it. Even non-Randists might concur with this, since politics is as much the art of changing people's values as it is the art of sorting them out, as any Marxist knows!

Rand views history ever since the time of ancient Greece as being, for the most part, the result of a competition for influence between two philosophies; the times when men advanced being the times when Aristotle's metaphysical ideas gained prominence, and the times when men declined being when Platonic mysticism dominated. Aristotelian ideas gave the men of reason a chance to build their societies; outright mysticism gave Attila and the Witch Doctor a chance to tear them down. With the fall of Rome, Rand contends, Aristotle faded into obscurity, while a resurgence of religion and unreason plunged Europe into the superstition, violence and anarchy of the Dark Ages. Under the conditions created by such mysticism, Attila and people like him thrived. This came to an end when Thomas Aquinas and related thinkers rediscovered Aristotle and hence reason, thus heralding the dawn of the Renaissance.



Rand regarded Thomas Aquinas as a major figure in the revival of Aristotelian thought, although for one who thought so much of Aquinas, it is strange to see her devote only one sentence to him in her views on history. Nonetheless, while Rand and Aquinas do share a respect for reason and logic, their political views differ greatly indeed.

Essentially, while Thomas Aquinas was a great advocate of reason, he did not question the dominance of the church in men's lives, and held that one should be obedient to church and state. Those who disobeyed would be dealt with harshly. As he stated: "The virtue of every subject consists in his being well subjected to his ruler."<sup>222</sup>

In metaphysics and epistemology, Aquinas held, in opposition to his times, that even god interacted with the world in an orderly and understandable way. The world was for Aquinas an orderly realm and thus a subject for logical inquiry, and not some "wicked" place. Knowledge of this world, furthermore, could be arrived at by reason. Thus, while Aquinas did maintain his commitment to god and faith, he did give reason a major role in human affairs, which was something quite extraordinary given the prevailing philosophies of the time.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Pegis, p. 759.

<sup>223</sup> Thomas Gilby, The Political Thought of Thomas Aquinas, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 114.

Aquinas' ethics are divided into two distinct areas: the natural virtues, and the theological virtues. The former was the province of reason, and aimed at self-realization, while the latter was the province of faith, and were obtainable by god's grace only. Still, Aquinas was a pioneer here in that for the first time in the Christian era, reason was given a preponderant place in ethics.

In his politics, Aquinas also held some very pro-freedom, pro-reason viewpoints, although he was hardly consistent in this regard. He was an advocate of the rule of law, and held that while force had a place in human affairs, it should be justified by reasons, and not excuses. Laws must correspond to facts of reality and be derived from reason. He wrote: "Law is in the reason alone."<sup>224</sup> He also held that laws should conform to four major criteria: laws should be intelligible, and not arbitrary; they should serve the common good; they should be as limited as possible so as to preserve conditions of freedom; and they must be understood and accepted by the populace to be of any use.<sup>225</sup>

Like Aristotle, Aquinas held that the common good could be a subject of the laws, and similarly, Aquinas held the common good to be a life of virtue and happiness. He wrote:

A private person cannot lead one to virtue efficaciously; for he can only advise, and if his advice is not taken, it has no coercive power, such as the law should have, in order to prove an effica-

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<sup>224</sup> Pegis, p. 743.

<sup>225</sup> Morrall, pp. 114-130.

cious inducement to virtue.<sup>226</sup>

Again, Rand would argue here that while the virtuous life may well be the best life to live, it is by no means possible or necessary that the law should be a tool to force all to be virtuous. Conversely, the law is best left to allowing those who wish to be virtuous the freedom to do so. In the same way as one cannot force people to be free, one could not likely force people to be happy. Those who despise the life of virtue will, as Rand would maintain, live a miserable enough life without having to be punished by the law.

As to the structure of government, Aquinas basically adopted an Aristotelian approach. The ruler should serve his subjects, and rule in their interests. Political interests should be well-dispersed amongst the populace, and not concentrated in any elite. Nonetheless, he was not an advocate of unlimited democracy, for he held that the rulers should be: "...a balance of majesty, nobility, and popularity."<sup>227</sup> The rulers in Aquinas' state should thus be neither be an oligarchy nor a democracy; they should be self-supporting, responsible men, somewhat like Aristotle's country gentlemen.

Nonetheless, whoever ruled was clearly superior to his subjects. He was part of a hierarchy descended from god, and so long as he ruled for the common good, his authority was

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<sup>226</sup> Pegis, p. 746.

<sup>227</sup> Morrall, p. 295.

not to be questioned. As Gilby writes: "God's majesty was to be obeyed in all matters."<sup>228</sup> Aquinas' approach to politics was greatly influenced by Aristotle's preoccupation with the Golden Mean. It was also influenced by his Christian background and his deference to authority. Despite this, Rand granted him a great deal of praise for one cardinal accomplishment: his devotion to the power of reason and man's mind. Without Aquinas and the pro-reason thinkers of his time, the Dark Ages might not have ended.

One can see here why Rand views professional philosophers as fundamentally responsible for history; when they embraced reason, progress followed; when they embraced mysticism, such ideas led to disaster. Rand views philosophers as the originators of the ideas that make history; she believes that philosophy has an enormous responsibility here upon which it has often defaulted.<sup>229</sup>

Following the Renaissance, the Industrial Revolution gave practical and material expression to the ideas of reason. Thus the professional businessman was born, as the producer of material goods. In Rand's view, even though many do not see the matter this way, the businessman was a natural partner to the producer of ideas, even if such a relationship was more implicit than explicit throughout history. Thus, if the philosopher and the businessman do work together, they

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid., p. 323.

<sup>229</sup> FTNI, pp. 23-24.

can ensure progress in history. In one country, more than any other, this implicit agreement worked to create tremendous political and economic freedom: the United States of America. America is a country which stands, in Rand's view, as the closest mankind has ever gotten to a practical expression of reason in a government. For once a country was led by men who were both producers and thinkers; men who believed in the necessity of production and knew what kinds of institutions could foster it. As a result, the American Founding Fathers produced a nation which was both intellectually and economically free, barring exceptions like the existence of some controls on the economy, and also the fact that the American system laboured under the enormous contradiction of slavery, a contradiction which sullied America's otherwise valuable achievements.<sup>230</sup>

However, Rand notes that the resurgence of reason was relatively shortlived. It enjoyed enough prominence to give birth to political and economic freedom, but philosophy almost immediately disowned its new child. Aristotelian ideas of reason and the validity of the senses were soon under attack again, even while capitalism was in its infancy. Under such an attack, it is indeed surprising that economic freedom got as far as it did. The institutions of the thinkers and producers gave way, slowly, to unreason, self-sacrifice, and eventually collectivism. Within 300 years, philosophers and businessmen were at utter cross-purposes.

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid., pp. 25-28.

Descartes had begun this attack on reason long before the industrial revolution, so that by the time such an event occurred, the philosophical base that capitalism rested upon had been so thoroughly undercut that it went into decline almost immediately. Descartes primarily upheld the primacy of consciousness, and in doing so attacked the Aristotelian primacy of existence. Philosophy began to doubt that it could ever grapple with the issue of how one was to convert percepts into conceptual knowledge, so it began to split into the rationalist and empiricist camps, both of which, Rand holds, accept Platonic ideas, but in slightly different forms. Rand contends that this situation led to the eventual annihilation of reason in philosophy. In her view, it was Immanuel Kant who completed the job, by splitting the world into the phenomenal and noumenal realms. One, the phenomenal, was a mere delusion, a creation of man's conceptual faculty, that was not to be trusted in any case. The noumenal was the higher, perfect reality, but knowable only by intuition or revelation. Rand holds that it was Kant who brought Plato's ideas back into play in a major way. But Rand holds that Kant did much more than this; he brought into general acceptance the morality of altruism, a morality of selflessness and self-sacrifice. By this, Kant gave collectivism the firm ethical base that was necessary to ensure its success.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid., pp. 28-32.

At this time, the idea of state worship became popular among philosophers; the idea that the state is man's highest goal and that he ought to be at one with it. Although Rand did not mention Rousseau's contribution in this regard, it is worth noting that he held that:

If each citizen is nothing and can do nothing without the rest, and the resources [of] the whole are equal to or superior to the aggregate of the resources of all the individuals, it may be said that legislation is at the highest possible point of perfection.<sup>232</sup>

As a result of the dominance of the ideas of Kant, (and others) and the lack of any serious challenge to them, Rand contends that it only had to be a matter of time before thinkers like Hegel and Marx could devise ways of implementing such ideas politically. Following on the ideas of previous anti-reason and anti-self philosophers, Marx gave birth to anti-capitalism, viewing history as a chaotic procession of conflict, of man's wealth as the product of mindless physical labour, and of physical force as an appropriate means of gaining that wealth. In a short time, Lenin gave collectivism political expression, just as western capitalism was at its zenith and going into decline. Similar to pre-Renaissance thinkers and producers, the modern businessman began to come under increasing attack, an attack which has intensified greatly in this century. Like his predecessors, the modern producer has been subjected to an astounding amount of abuse and hardship; abuse that might eventual-

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<sup>232</sup> Rousseau, p. 36.

ly have the result of eliminating productive personalities, the very people on whom the survival of civilization depends. These events troubled Rand greatly, and were her reason for writing her books. But given what had gone on in philosophy over the previous hundred or so years, she was not surprised at such a turn of events.<sup>233</sup>

Rand laments that the challenge to reason and capitalism was never effectively met. Had it been, she reasons that history would have been radically different. Unfortunately, she notes, capitalism's defenders retreated into pragmatism, believing that what is good is what works. Politically, pragmatism gave way to subjectivism and truth by majority rule. The democratic institutions that had been founded on reason and a philosophy of strict limits on political power had now run wild. Many on the political right declared as a result that perhaps democracy was at fault, and that men needed strong rulers, when all along it was not the institution that was flawed, but the philosophy that guided it. Rand maintains that if the defenders of capitalism had not turned away from a defense of rational selfishness, they would have not had to witness the rise of Soviet Russia's communism and the welfare state and limitless spending that is destroying their economies built on reason. If they had accepted Aristotelian metaphysics and worked with it, to build a more wholly rational system of thought, they would not have had to default to Platonist ideas. Rand sees her

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<sup>233</sup> FTNI, pp. 32-34.



place in history as being the thinker who would build on Aristotle's ideas, (at least within the parameters of her understanding of this philosopher) and give ethical and political expression to his metaphysics, thereby putting an end to the Platonist ideals of self-sacrifice and collectivism. While Rand did make some cogent points throughout her theory of history, it is clear that her scholarship was frequently defective.<sup>234</sup> She would have done far better had she substantially expanded her reading base and, one might add, footnoted some of her material more extensively. Nonetheless, however one might disagree with some of the specifics of Rand's interpretation of history, one must admit that most of her philosophical views have not thereby been invalidated, including her ultimate goal of a laissez-faire state.

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<sup>234</sup> For instance, her strictures against "Platonic mysticism" are better aimed at Neo-Platonism and Augustinian Christianity than at Plato himself. In fact, Rand's treatment of human societal issues bears a strong resemblance to Plato's rationalizing and standardizing methodology. She would undoubtedly reject the cautious approach recommended by Aristotle in his Ethics (Bk. 1, Ch. 3) while her ideal of "man qua man" has great methodological affinities to Plato's uncompromising paradigm of the perfect individual.

## Chapter VIII

### RAND AND HER CRITICS

It would be worthwhile now to look at some of Ayn Rand's critics, so that one can gauge the kind of response she has received in intellectual and political circles. In looking at such criticisms, one notes that the great bulk of it comes not from the political left, but rather from the right. Moreover, Rand's most vociferous and polemical critics often come from the religious right. It appears, as one will see, that this imbalance is probably due to the fact that conservatives are not so angry with Rand for defending capitalism, but for defending it on grounds of rational selfishness and rejecting any argument from faith. Thus, Rand has appealed to potential defenders of capitalism who do not want to have to be associated with conservatives. As this seems to take potential recruits away from the conservative movement, the political right may feel slighted by her actions. The lack of much criticism of her by the political left is not likely the result of the fact that they agree with her, but rather that they have plenty of their own theorists to deal with.

The American religious conservative movement has been particularly harsh with Rand and her ideas ever since, it

appears, Atlas Shrugged was published in 1957. With sales of the book leaping upwards, and perhaps a good many conservatives having a look at Rand's ideas, the staff of the American conservative journal, National Review, decided that it was time to repudiate her. As the magazine is perhaps the most popular publication amongst American conservatives, it can be assumed that their opinion of Rand constitutes a good idea of how conservative intellectuals view her. In 1957, noted conservative Whittaker Chambers was asked to review Atlas Shrugged, and review it he did. He wrote: "I find it a remarkably silly book."<sup>235</sup>

More to the point, the major objection that Chambers had with regards to Rand's ideas was that he interpreted them as being conducive to the establishment of a technocracy that would run society, a technocracy made up of John Galts and Howard Roarks who would presumably tell us all how to live. As Chambers says:

Miss Rand, as the enemy of any socializing force, calls in a Big Brother of her own contriving to do battle with the other. In the name of free enterprise, therefore, she plumps for a technocratic elite.<sup>236</sup>

As mentioned before, Rand does mention that in a rational society, virtue ought to be rewarded, such that the most able receive the most rewards. However, it seems rather odd that one could conceive this to be a call for a technocracy,

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<sup>235</sup> Whittaker Chambers, "Big Sister Is Watching You", National Review, Dec. 28, 1957, p. 594.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., p. 595.

since Rand did not say that such favours would be dispensed by governments. Rather, the market would dispense them, giving more benefits to those who produced more goods. Furthermore, such power as would be derived from this distribution would not be the power to run societies; it would only be economic power, which Rand clearly separates from political power. As she says:

Economic power is exercised by means of a positive, by offering man a reward, an incentive, a payment, a value; political power is exercised by means of a negative, by the threat of punishment, injury, imprisonment, destruction.<sup>237</sup>

As Rand sees it, no businessman can ever be a dictator even if he does well in the marketplace; he cannot force people to buy his products; he cannot compel them to shop in his stores. His customers associate with him on the basis of whether they like his product or not; they sanction him if they buy it. If they do not like his product, they can shop elsewhere, albeit the choices may not always be equal. Economic power is thus the power of persuasion, which is far different from the power that any technocracy could exercise, namely that of physical coercion.

But Chamber's article also points out another chief criticism that religious conservatism has for Rand: that she, by postulating a moral code without a supernatural deity for guidance, advocates hedonism and vulgar materialism. As Chambers writes:

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<sup>237</sup> C:TUI, p. 48.

For if Man's 'heroism' no longer derives from God...then Man becomes merely the most consuming of animals, with glut as the condition of his happiness and its replenishment his foremost activity.<sup>238</sup>

Again though, Chambers appears to be misconstruing a great deal of what Rand is saying. Rand did not advocate wanton pleasure as man's standard of value, but rather that an abstract moral ideal be his standard. Essentially, this is what Christianity advocates as well. It appears then that the real criticism that Chambers makes of Rand is that she simply did not base her ethics on god and he could not bring himself to understand how someone could do this.

Nonetheless, modern conservatives continue to attack Rand. Not long after her death, one conservative called her: "...so to speak, the Alger Hiss of the right"<sup>239</sup> At the same time, prominent conservative William F. Buckley Jr. remarked of Rand: "May she rest in peace, and may she experience the demystification of her mind possessed."<sup>240</sup>

Still other critics consist of those who basically agree with Rand's works, but find problems in certain areas. Sid Greenberg, for instance, finds a problem with living up to the abstract ideal that Rand sets up as her standard of value: the life of a rational human being. He finds it diffi-

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<sup>238</sup> Chambers, p. 595.

<sup>239</sup> Terry Teachout, "Farewell Dagny Taggart", National Review, Vol 34, May 14, 1982, p. 566.

<sup>240</sup> Wm. F. Buckley, Jr., "On The Right", National Review, Vol. 34, April 2, 1982, p. 381.

cult to know just what this constitutes, for Rand's novels to him seem to portray very distant characters. Instead, he proposes that happiness be the standard, which would be, according to him, very easy to follow as a guide. However, to avoid the charge of hedonism, Greenberg is pressed to claim that he only means a particular type of happiness, a 'rational' happiness. However, this is once again another abstract ideal!<sup>241</sup>

Nonetheless, Greenberg raises an interesting point about the style in which Rand presented her ideas: philosophy encased in fiction. This style was probably the chief reason why Rand enjoyed the success she did; she put important fundamental philosophical ideas into a format that made them more real to many people, to show them how those ideals would be carried out given certain contexts. Had Rand not written any fiction, her popularity would have likely been drastically less than it is now. In that sense, her fiction novels were an indispensable part of her task of spreading her ideas. However, when one reads her novels, and looks at the way in which her characters deal with their situations, one must constantly remember that what, for instance, works for John Galt in a particular setting may not work in your instance and context. If one approached Rand's novels mistakenly, one could treat them as one would treat the Bible; as a set of concretes from which one can draw parallels to

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<sup>241</sup> Sid Greenberg, Alienation and Ayn Rand, (San Francisco: Sid Greenberg, 1977), p. 120.

situations one encounters in one's own life, and act as the characters in the Bible or Atlas Shrugged do. However, one's own life, context and situation may be entirely different from the life, context and situation of Rand's characters. Unless the instances are nearly identical, what is fine for Howard Roark to do in a particular instance may be a disastrous course of action for you to take. Rather, Rand's novels have to be seen as possible courses of action, given possible contexts. What one has to do then is work with Rand's fundamental principles in order to find out what an appropriate course of action might be, and not draw poor parallels between oneself and the concrete situations that her heroes are involved in.

Nathaniel Branden, of course, has not been an associate of Rand's for many years. In fact, Rand repudiated him in 1968. However, he offers that Rand's ideas on emotions in particular and psychology in general may have been inadequate. Rand has said that in a conflict between one's emotions and conscious convictions, one should choose the conscious conviction as a guide to action. However, Branden counsels that this may only be the case in situations where one has to make a fast decision. Moreover, these instances are generally very few. Thus, Branden advises that in cases where one has the time, one ought to bring one's emotions out for examination and a comparison with one's conscious convictions, if there is a discrepancy, before making any

decision. One could find out that one's emotions in some cases are more accurate indicators of actions than one's conscious convictions. Of course, one thinks that here Rand might be tempted to agree.<sup>242</sup>

Ayn Rand also held to the belief, as one saw in the discussion on her view of history, that philosophical convictions explain much of human behaviour. However, Nathaniel Branden points out that:

Many factors contribute to who we become as human beings: our genes, our maturation, our unique biological potentials and limitations, our life experiences and the conclusions we draw from them, the knowledge and information available to us, and, of course, our premises or philosophical beliefs....<sup>243</sup>

Rand was not, in any professional sense, a psychologist, and it is probable that in her status as a philosopher she overlooked some of these factors as possible explanations for human behaviour, important though they are in explaining why humans act the way they do. This is actually more of an addition to her thought than a subtraction from it, and as time passes there will likely be more additions to that thought. Nonetheless, her critics are hard-pressed to deny that she has impacted greatly on our culture. As one critic adds: "...for better or worse--Miss Rand has refused to shut up and go away."<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Nathaniel Branden, "The Benefits and Hazards of the Philosophy of Ayn Rand", The Journal of Humanistic Psychology, Vol. 24, No. 4, Fall 1984, pp. 50-54.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>244</sup> William F. O'Neill, With Charity Toward None, (New York:



Before ending this discussion, one might be interested to know what kinds of responses Ayn Rand would have had for such critics. Such criticisms, it seems, are best answered by referring back to her works, for Ayn Rand did not answer her critics directly. As far as she was concerned, the answers were in her novels and books. She was, in her opinion, not going to bring attention to the ideas of her critics by answering their charges.

## Chapter IX

### CONCLUSION

Ayn Rand's work, for the most part, is often original and precise in its formulation. In her philosophy, she goes to some lengths to demonstrate how man's universe is non-contradictory and rational, and how man's own nature is much the same. She draws the conclusion that rational individuals can fit together rationally, and get along with each other, with an absence of conflict. She holds that rational political institutions can evolve out of this situation, institutions which recognize man's nature and allow him the freedom he needs to live.

In today's political scene, to say that a rational man is very rare is to state the obvious, but to state that such an ideal is unattainable seems odd. As Nathaniel Branden states, Rand:

creates characters who aren't in the Middle Ages, who aren't running around in outer space, but who are of our time and of this earth--who work, struggle, pursue difficult career goals, fall in love, participate in emotional relationships, and for whom life is an incredible adventure because they have made it so.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Nathaniel Branden, "The Benefits and Hazards of the Philosophy of Ayn Rand", p. 46.

Thus, if one is willing to remember that rational men do not evade reality and never follow their desires blindly, the contention that there are no conflicts of interests between them becomes real; if one disregards that context, then such conflicts would seem very obvious and commonplace. In the case of honest mistakes and errors of knowledge, this does not herald a conflict between rational men, as one has seen. Only those who deliberately evade new knowledge and evidence will bring conflict into their lives. Those who do not evade such evidence readjust their thinking correspondingly. They do not become irrational and hence a source of conflict. As well, it is important to keep in mind that Rand is not contending that in a society ruled by rational men there will be no conflicts whatsoever. She does not hold that all men are rational, or will choose to be rational. Conflicts amongst themselves or with rational men would not be eliminated. However, Rand holds that with the proper institutions, rational men can ensure that such irrational people can be dealt with and will be no serious threat to the former.

In the case of Rand's ethical theory especially, she has done an enormous favour to potential defenders of laissez-faire capitalism by giving them a moral basis to work from, and by demonstrating how capitalism is not a system of conflict. With Rand's ethics, one can attempt a much more coherent defense of capitalism than one could if one stuck

to defending capitalism on grounds of faith or statistics, something which has been done far too often in the past with no desirable effects. However, Rand was not the only person ever to write on the nature of reason, self-interest or capitalism, and must be seen not as the only defender of economic freedom around, but rather as a valuable contributor to the wealth of thought on this matter already in existence. Despite this, it is clear that the free-enterprise system is continuing to suffer more and more abuse under the welfare state. If the defenders of capitalism are to once again reassert themselves, it is difficult to deny that Ayn Rand's philosophy can be of assistance. While there were many areas of thought that she did not cover adequately, such as psychology, economics and history, one must remember that no thinker has ever covered all the issues, and Rand is no exception. As to the issues that she did address, one may honestly say that she addressed them well, for the most part. As pointed out, she could well have expanded on her view of history, or in certain areas like the rights of children. She cannot fairly, in light of her writings, be considered much of a commentator on other thinkers either. Despite this, although those who hold to Rand's philosophy are far from numerous, her ideas have potential like any others. At this stage, it is only a possibility that her ideas will come into widespread acceptance. But nonetheless, it is useful to remember that Karl Marx's ideas probably started out with the same kind of derision that Rand's often

get; yet forty years after Marx's death, a nation was founded on his beliefs. In any case, if mankind is ever to have an era of economic freedom again, Rand's ideas deserve serious consideration.

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