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## *Atlas Shrugged* on the Role of the Mind in Man's Existence

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Ayn Rand described the theme of *Atlas Shrugged* as “the role of the mind in man’s existence,” and my aim in this essay is to call attention to what the novel has to say about this role.<sup>1</sup> The novel operates on a grand, social-political scale dramatizing not only the mind’s role in an individual human life, but also in society as a whole.<sup>2</sup> As the story of “the mind on strike” (738),<sup>3</sup> it conveys this role by depicting what happens to a society when “the men of the mind” withdraw.<sup>4</sup> What the novel shows about society at large, however, follows from what it shows about individual men; and, in the present essay, I will focus on the role of the mind in an individual life.<sup>5</sup>

Since *Atlas*’s plot centers around the “men of the mind,” it is necessary to comment briefly at the outset about what distinguishes these men from others. The phrase itself implies that the mind plays a central role in the lives of some people that it does not play in the lives of others, and this might be taken to suggest that the mind is somehow the exclusive province of a select few—a view that has loomed large in the history of thought. I will say more about what the mind (or reason or intellect) is on Rand’s view shortly, but we can begin by identifying it as the faculty responsible for thinking and epitomized in such uniquely human achievements as science, mathematics, philosophy, and (Rand would insist) industry. Plato and a train of subsequent thinkers, noticing that most people do not devote their lives to science or philosophy, and thinking that they lack the native intelligence required to do so, concluded that reason could figure in the lives of most people only (or primarily) through their relations to their intellectual superiors—usually relations of obedience or subjugation. The Platonic view is a *metaphysical elitism*, on which innate differences between men divide them into castes of rulers and ruled; it is incompatible with the political freedom that *Atlas Shrugged* vigorously defends and is precisely what the American Founders denied when they declared that “All men are created equal.” Despite attempts of some hostile reviewers to attribute this sort of elitism to *Atlas Shrugged*, the novel could not be clearer in rejecting it.<sup>6</sup>

While many of the heroes are unusually intelligent, others, though exceptional in many respects, are not portrayed as being endowed with any special native intelligence. Think of the young mother in the valley (784) or the truck driver who doesn’t want to remain one (721), or of Owen Kellogg, the young engineer who goes on strike in the first chapter (25)—he is portrayed as unusually competent but not in any way that implies a special innate intelligence. Even Dagny does not have the sort of genius characteristic of Rearden and Francisco, and they themselves lack the sort of brilliance personified by Galt, who Rearden describes as “the sort of mind that’s born once in a century” (290). Moreover, such characters as Eddie and Cherryl, who represent

the best among average men, are shown as having deep similarities with the strikers that make them too qualify as “men of the mind.” Cheryl for example is likened to a scientist when Jim complains that her “constant asking of a why for everything” amounts to treating him “as if [he] were a scientific object in a laboratory” (882). Think also of the many characters, often unnamed, whose competence or effort gives them a bond with the heroes: the cigarette vender with whom Dagny sometimes chats in the terminal (61, 353, 382); the people responsible for the “clean white curtain,” fresh vegetables, and expert steering of a bus that lift Eddie’s spirits when he sees them en route to the Taggart Building early in the first chapter (4); and so forth. Since, as we’ll see, Rand sees all forms of competence as of a piece and attributes them to the minds of individuals, it is clear that these characters all have minds in the sense that matters to Rand’s theme.

What the positive characters share is not a certain degree of intelligence, but the commitment to using such intelligence as they do possess.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the villains are not portrayed as lacking intelligence—indeed Stadler is a genius; rather their evil consists in a choice to subvert their minds.<sup>8</sup> The consistent position of the novel is that, though there are differences in degrees of intelligence, we all possess the faculty of reason, and it can and should play the same role in each of our lives. What unites the men of the mind, is not genius, but “an *unbreached rationality*”—“not the degree of your intelligence, but the full and relentless use of your mind, not the extent of your knowledge, but the acceptance of reason as an absolute” (1059).

The novel’s primary message with regard to the differences in the degrees of men’s intelligence is: first, that each man, in proportion to the degree of his intelligence and his consistency in employing it, benefits himself and all the people with whom he interacts; and, second, that the dominant moral code (which is rooted in a failure or refusal to recognize the role of the mind in man’s existence) damns each of us in this same proportion. The strike depicted in the novel is the refusal by the men of the mind to submit to this injustice any longer. Every man who is committed to the fullest use of his mind is a “man of the mind,” but the title applies most dramatically to those men of rare intelligence who are mankind’s greatest benefactors and have been its greatest victims, and these are the men who Galt makes it his special mission to remove from society, though he recruits others to his cause along the way.<sup>9</sup>

Because *Atlas*’s heroes have powerful intellects and exercise them consistently, they epitomize the function of a mind. But the mind of any individual can and should play the same role in his life, regardless of the degree of his intelligence.

## THE HUMAN FORM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Before we can say anything substantive about the mind’s role, we must first get clearer on what the mind or reason is. We have said already that it is the faculty that is responsible for thinking and that distinguishes us from other animals. Like people, animals—at least many of them—are conscious. In particular, they have the faculty of sense-perception, by means of which they are aware of the objects in their immediate environment. Some animals have memory, which enables them to learn about these objects, making use of information from past encounters with an object to better deal with it in the present. By associating perceptibly similar objects, these animals can also apply material learned about one object or situation to others that are perceptibly like it, and so they are able to master such basic skills as hunting. But such skills represent the upper limit of consciousness for the (nonhuman) animals, whereas human knowledge extends far further.<sup>10</sup>

Man is able to acquire vast sums of knowledge about categories of objects which are not perceptibly similar, and which may not be perceptible at all. For example, he can grasp laws of motion that apply alike to apples, planets, and molecules. From the human perspective, the world is not, as it is for an animal, a succession of objects and situations that are more or less reminiscent of one another. Instead, we are aware of the world *conceptually*. A concept is a unit of thought, of the sort normally represented in speech by a single word, that applies to a whole category of objects that have a common nature and act accordingly. Concepts enable man to grasp causal connections that are inaccessible to animals and so to achieve an *understanding* of the world. Reason, since the birth of philosophy in ancient Greece, has been identified as the faculty that enables this distinctly human perspective.

Rand, following in the philosophical tradition of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, held that reason functions by processing the information we acquire about the world in sense-perception into a new and more powerful form of consciousness, which remains grounded in perception.<sup>11</sup> Thus Galt defines reason as “the faculty that perceives, identifies, and integrates the material provided by man’s senses.”<sup>12</sup> He elaborates:

All thinking is a process of identification and integration. Man perceives a blob of color; by integrating the evidence of his sight and his touch, he learns to identify it as a solid object; he learns to identify the object as a table; he learns that the table is made of wood; he learns that the wood consists of cells, that the cells consist of molecules, that the molecules consist of atoms. All through this process, the work of his mind consists of answers to a single question: *What is it?* (1016–17)

We identify, for example, a particular man, by subsuming him and his characteristics under concepts such as “man,” “animal,” “rational,” “virtue,” “inventor,” “genius,” and so forth. And in forming a concept we integrate our knowledge about many objects into a single, unitary awareness of them.<sup>13</sup> This makes it possible to think, for example, about animals in general—or, more widely, about entities or actions as such, or even about existence as a whole.

Increasingly abstract concepts enable a grasp of increasingly complex causal connections, ranging over greater expanses of time. Thus, an animal, without any concepts, might be able to learn that eating a berry will satiate its hunger, but only a man can learn that planting bushes will result in a crop of berries months into the future, or that by irrigating a field, he can make it possible for berries to grow on what would otherwise be barren land. Moreover, he can go on to learn that his ability to produce berries in this manner and to benefit from the harvest depends on political freedom, which cannot be defended except on the basis of a whole philosophy.

Whereas the functioning of our sense organs is automatic, the formation and use of concepts are (to a large extent at least) under our conscious control, and this imposes a responsibility on us. Galt makes this point when describing the development of a human consciousness:

the day when [a child] grasps that he is not a passive recipient of the sensations of any given moment, that his senses do not provide him with automatic knowledge in separate snatches independent of context, but only with the material of knowledge, which his mind must learn to integrate—the day when he grasps that his senses cannot deceive him, that physical objects cannot act without causes, that his organs of perception are physical and have no volition, no power to invent or to distort, that the evidence they give him is an absolute, but his mind must

learn to understand it, his mind must discover the nature, the causes, the full context of his sensory material, his mind must identify the things that he perceives—*that* is the day of his birth as a thinker and scientist. (1041)

Unlike the senses, then, reason is a faculty that man must self-consciously exercise and learn how to exercise. Man must discover the laws of logic, and then adhere to them *by choice*. It is only by doing this that he manages to attain his distinctive form of awareness—a point Galt captures by describing man as a “being of volitional consciousness.” As Rand makes the point in her nonfiction, man must choose to engage in the process of *thinking*, which is “not a passive state of registering random impressions” but

an actively sustained process of identifying one’s impressions in conceptual terms, of integrating every event and every observation into a conceptual context, of grasping relationships, differences, similarities in one’s perceptual material and of abstracting them into new concepts, of drawing inferences, of making deductions, of reaching conclusions, of asking new questions and discovering new answers and expanding one’s knowledge into an ever-growing sum.<sup>14</sup>

The heroes of *Atlas Shrugged* are constantly engaged in this process. We can observe it in detail in the cases of Dagny and Rearden, the only major heroes whose thoughts are often narrated, and sometimes in the cases of Cherryl Taggart and Eddie Willers.<sup>15</sup> The novel also depicts a variety of people who do not engage in this activity. The simplest examples are minor characters like the residents of Starnesville. Consider the woman who “looked on without reaction” as a local child threw a rock at Rearden’s windshield:

She had stood there silently, watching, without interest or purpose, like a chemical compound on a photographic plate, absorbing visual shapes because they were there to be absorbed, but unable ever to form any estimate of the objects of her vision. (286)<sup>16</sup>

The woman can be taken as a symbol of mental passivity. Her senses function, but her mind does not; and so she forms no estimate of what she sees. She is likened to a photographic plate rather than to an animal (which also sees without thinking) because for animals this form of consciousness is complete and sufficient: they have automatic desires which lead them to act on what they perceive in the ways necessary to secure their survival. As we will see in greater detail later, this is not true in the case of man, and so the woman’s mental passivity renders her passive existentially as well, and reduces her to a subanimal state.

Significantly, the woman is described not merely as failing to form any estimate of what she sees, but as being unable to do so. This may be true in the sense that, after a lifetime of mental passivity, she lacks the context necessary to make meaningful evaluations of what she sees, but she is not (on Rand’s view) literally unable to think. In his speech, Galt says that “in every hour and every issue” one has a “basic moral choice” between “thinking and nonthinking,” and Rand elaborates on this choice in her nonfiction:

In any hour and issue of his life, man is free to think or to evade that effort. Thinking requires a state of full, focused awareness. The act of focusing one’s consciousness is volitional. Man can focus his mind to a full, active, purposefully directed awareness of reality—or he can unfocus it and let himself drift in a

semiconscious daze, merely reacting to any chance stimulus of the immediate moment, at the mercy of his undirected sensory-perceptual mechanism and of any random, associational connections it might happen to make.<sup>17</sup>

There is, then, a fundamental alternative between the states Rand calls “focus” and “drift.” The heroes are people who characteristically focus their minds and have developed a clarity-seeking psychology to which focus comes easily and drift is unnatural. The woman in Starnesville represents a different sort of psychology, habituated to drift, to which focus would be unnatural.

There is a third alternative in addition to focus and drift. Galt describes it as

that nameless act which all of you practice, but struggle never to admit: the act of blanking out, the willful suspension of one’s consciousness, the refusal to think—not blindness, but the refusal to see; not ignorance, but the refusal to know. It is the act of unfocusing your mind and inducing an inner fog to escape the responsibility of judgment—on the unstated premise that a thing will not exist if only you refuse to identify it, that A will not be A so long as you do not pronounce the verdict “*It is.*” (1017)

Following Rand in her nonfiction, we can call this act “evasion.”<sup>18</sup> *Atlas Shrugged’s* most dramatic portrayals of it involve Jim Taggart, who “jerks his head to stop” his thoughts when he feels as if they are “slipping down a dangerous blind alley, the end of which he must never permit himself to see” (866). Indeed, his first words in the novel are “Don’t bother me, don’t bother me, don’t bother me” (7). They are addressed in irritation to Eddie Willers, who has come to discuss an important issue on the railroad, but they may as well be addressed to reality as such.

Some evasion is required to maintain a state of drift over an extended period of time—and certainly over a lifetime: one cannot avoid periodically noticing signs that greater attention is called for, so one must evade these signs in order to remain in drift.<sup>19</sup> The residents of Starnesville for example have ample evidence that a better life existed there in the past and exists elsewhere in the present, and they must push this out of their minds in order to continue in their thoughtless, stagnant routine. Nevertheless, there is a difference between these characters who are perpetually adrift (evading as necessary to maintain it), and characters, like Taggart, whose perpetual mental state is one of evasion. The following descriptions would not apply to the residents of Starnesville:

This was the way he had lived all his life—keeping his eyes stubbornly, safely on the immediate pavement before him, craftily avoiding the sight of his road, of corners, of distances, of pinnacles. (867)

. . . danger to him was a signal to shut off his sight, suspend his judgment and pursue an unaltered course on the unstated premise that the danger would remain unreal by the sovereign power of his wish not to see it—like a fog-horn within him, blowing not to sound a warning, but to summon the fog. (868)<sup>20</sup>

Here we see a mind habituated to evasion, and it is such people who are the villains in *Atlas Shrugged*. They are people who do not merely fail to use their minds, but who live their lives on the principle of subverting them.

Evasion is, in Galt's words, "an act of annihilation, a wish to negate existence, an attempt to wipe out reality" (1018), and it is a thesis of *Atlas Shrugged's* that the psychology of an evader is centered around a fundamental antipathy for existence as such, and for all the values that make human existence possible. The psychology of evil will not be my focus in the present essay, but it is necessary to mention it here, because it is not only minor negative characters like the passive residents of Starnesville, but also villains like Jim Taggart who serve as contrasts by which the role played by the mind in the lives of the heroes is brought out. While the passive characters represent the mere absence of mental functioning, the villains represent its antithesis.<sup>21</sup>

As a final topic connected with drift and evasion, it will be instructive to say a few words about an epistemological doctrine that is an expression and rationalization of the psychology of passive men and evaders. The doctrine is "mysticism," which Rand defines as follows:

Mysticism is the acceptance of allegations without evidence or proof, either apart from or *against* the evidence of one's senses and of reason. Mysticism is the claim to some non-sensory, non-rational, non-definable, non-identifiable means of knowledge, such as "instinct," "intuition," "revelation," of any form of "just knowing."<sup>22</sup>

Mysticism is the source of the "Morality of Death" against which Galt calls the strike, and he discusses it at some length in his speech (1027).<sup>23</sup> I mention it here because this doctrine is diametrically opposed to *Atlas Shrugged's* position on the role of the mind, and we will have occasion to note the contrast in connection with the aspects of the mind's role that we will focus on in the remaining sections of this essay.

For the present, we can use the contrast to help sum up what we have already seen about Rand's conception of the mind. Man's means of knowledge is reason, and there can be no such thing as "just knowing," because reason does not function automatically; rather, knowledge is something that must be achieved by integrating our sensory material to form progressively wider concepts, by identifying what we observe in conceptual terms, and integrating these observations into an ever-growing conceptual awareness of reality. This is what it means for a man to be conscious, and reason is man's means of consciousness.

What, then, is its role in man's existence? We can begin our answer with an observation Rand makes in her nonfiction: "Consciousness—for those living organisms which possess it—is the basic means of survival. For man, the basic means of survival is *reason*."<sup>24</sup>

## THE PRODUCTIVE FACULTY

Have you ever looked for the root of production? Take a look at an electric generator and dare tell yourself that it was created by the muscular effort of unthinking brutes. Try to grow a seed of wheat without the knowledge left to you by men who had to discover it for the first time. Try to obtain your food by means of nothing but physical motions—and you'll learn that man's mind is the root of all the goods produced and of all the wealth that has ever existed on earth. (410)

The words are Francisco's. In her nonfiction, Rand describes production as "the application of reason to the problem of survival," explaining that "The action required to sustain human life is primarily intellectual: everything man needs has to be discovered by his mind and produced by his effort."<sup>25</sup> This point is a central theme in *Atlas Shrugged*: its philosophical

speeches underscore, and the progression of its plot dramatizes, the many ways in which our lives depend on technologies and how these technologies are produced and sustained by thought.

At their first meeting, looking out on a stormy night from a formal party with “summer flowers and half-naked women,” Francisco says to Rearden: “It’s a terrible night for any animal caught unprotected on that plain. . . . This is when one should appreciate the meaning of being a man.” He describes Rearden as “saving” his guests “from the storm.” The truth and significance of Francisco’s remark becomes increasingly clear as the men of the mind withdraw from society. Dr. Stadler finds it too cold to work in the laboratories of the State Science Institute, which lack oil for heat during the winter following Wyatt’s disappearance (339). The next winter, when the rest of the Colorado industrialists have gone, people do “not care to remember that there had been a time when snowstorms did not sweep, unresisted, down unlighted roads and upon the roofs of unheated houses, did not stop the movement of trains, did not leave a wake of corpses counted by the hundreds” (496). “The last of the trucks made by Lawrence Hammond” and “the best of the airplanes once made by Dwight Sanders” are lost in vain attempts to fight the storm. Earlier in the novel, Dagny describes such machines as “alive,”

because they are the physical shape of the action of a living power—of the mind that had been able to grasp the whole of this complexity, to set its purpose, to give it form. . . . They *are* alive, she thought, but their soul operates them by remote control. Their soul is in every man who has the capacity to equal this achievement. Should the soul vanish from the earth, the motors would stop, because *that* is the power which keeps them going. (246)

With Sanders and Hammond gone, the motors stop—the machines die; and so do the people whose lives depend on them.

When nature is more hospitable, as it is the following year in Minnesota, when they have “a bumper crop,” it is only through reason that men are able to take advantage of it (923). Agriculture itself and all the tools it requires are products of reason, and this particular crop only exists because the ingenuity of the farmers found a way to plant their wheat despite such obstacles as the deteriorating state of their equipment. The crop could not have been harvested if not for the foresight of Rearden, who recognizing the situation, turned his full attention to providing metal on credit to the manufacturers of farm equipment, who then sold it to the farmers on the same terms. Before the harvest can feed the nation (or profit the farmers and their suppliers), it needs to be transported to market, and this too requires technology and the intelligence to use it. In this case, despite a heroic effort by Dagny and Eddie, the harvest rots due to the irrationality of the bureaucrats who control the nation’s railroads.

Unlike animals who survive by repeating patterns of behavior that are innate or learned passively in childhood, in order to survive man must initiate and sustain a process of thought. And the result of this process is a sort of survival that is not possible for animals. Each new discovery enables us to live longer and better—a point made eloquently by Wyatt:

“I add an extra span of time to [my customers’] lives with every gallon of my oil that they burn. And since they’re men like me, they keep inventing faster ways to make the things they make—so every one of them grants me an added minute, hour or day with the bread I buy from them, with the clothes, the lumber, the metal”—he glanced at Galt—“an added year with every month of electricity I purchase.” (722)

Earlier in the novel Rearden speaks in similar terms of “what [Galt’s] motor would have meant if built”:

about ten years added to the life of every person in this country—If you consider how many things it would have made easier and cheaper to produce, how many hours of human labor it would have released for other work, and how much more anyone’s work would have brought him. (290)

Even the poorest among modern Americans now take for granted a standard of living and a longevity that was not possible to anyone prior to the Industrial Revolution. Throughout most of its history most of mankind was engaged in the sort of back- and spirit-breaking labor illustrated in the novel by the people of Starnesville. The passive woman there, discussed earlier, has “stooped shoulders” and “shuffling movements” that give her the “the mark of senility” at the age of thirty-seven. Dagny and Rearden wonder how she could have “come to such a state.” The answer is implied by the following paragraphs:

The last thing they saw, as they left the town, was a billboard. A design was still visible on its peeling strips, imprinted in the dead gray that had once been color. It advertised a washing machine.

In a distant field, beyond the town, they saw the figure of a man moving slowly, contorted by the ugliness of a physical effort beyond the proper use of a human body: he was pushing a plow by hand. (286)

Our conception of what it is like to be thirty-seven—or any other age—is colored by the availability of labor-saving technologies that are products of the mind. They vanish when it does, leaving man to labor “from sunrise to sunset at the shafts of a hand-plow for a bowl of rice” (1052) and woman to sit “with her shriveled face and pendulous breasts . . . grinding meal in a bowl, hour after hour, century by century” (1049).

In addition to being needed to create and sustain technology, intelligence is required for its use, if it is to be beneficial rather than harmful. This point is illustrated by the explosion in the Winston Tunnel (584–608), and by Project X, which, in the hands of a drunken Cuffy Meigs destroys everything within a hundred-mile radius, including the Taggart Bridge (1132).<sup>26</sup> Mulligan, who predicts the destruction of the bridge, elaborates on this theme:

Consider the physical risks of complex machinery in the hands of blind fools and fear-crazed cowards. Just think of their railroads—you’d be taking a chance on some such horror as that Winston tunnel incident every time you stepped aboard a train—and there will be more incidents of that kind, coming faster and faster. They’ll reach the stage where no day will pass without a major wreck. . . . And the same will be happening in every other industry, wherever machines are used—the machines which they thought could replace our minds. Plane crashes, oil tank explosions, blast-furnace break-outs, high-tension wire electrocutions, subway cave-ins and trestle collapses—they’ll see them all. The very machines that had made their life so safe, will now make it a continuous peril. (805–6)

Just as technology is a product of the mind that depends on it for its sustenance and use, so too is wealth. To maintain a fortune over time, one must invest it wisely, as the stories of the

Starnes heirs, Lee Hunsacker, and others illustrate (313–24). And the fortune itself only has value in a world populated by productive men with products for sale. Francisco explains:

When you accept money in payment for your effort, you do so only on the conviction that you will exchange it for the product of the effort of others. It is not the moochers or the looters who give value to money. Not an ocean of tears nor all the guns in the world can transform those pieces of paper in your wallet into the bread you will need to survive tomorrow. Those pieces of paper, which should have been gold, are a token of honor—your claim upon the energy of the men who produce. Your wallet is your statement of hope that somewhere in the world around you there are men who will not default on that moral principle which is the root of money. (410)

The point is illustrated in the action of the novel. Mr. Thompson summarizes the result of Galt's withdrawal of the mind when he observes that "people are starving and giving up, the economy is falling to pieces, nobody is producing any longer" (1089). When, in an effort to entice Galt to solve the problem, he offers Galt a "a billion dollars—a cool, neat billion dollars," Galt points out that the money will not buy him anything in a world lacking producers—in a world without the mind.

Just as technology and wealth are products of the mind, which can neither be sustained nor be of any benefit in its absence, so too, though in a less obvious way, are natural resources. These are not man-made in the normal sense of that term, but their *value* is produced, and is a product of reason. Oil, for example, is not created by man, and would continue to exist if men were to vanish entirely or if they stopped using their minds. But intelligence is needed to find oil, to extract it from the earth, and to refine it. In the novel we see that Wyatt is able to do this—and to do it in new and innovative ways—whereas the drudges at the State Science Institute are not (248–49, 343, 519, 720–23). More importantly, though, intelligence is needed to discover oil's uses and to implement them. It is of no use to an animal, and is only of use to men like Jim Taggart because there are other men who know how to put it to use powering and lubricating machines that he does not understand. Without the minds of such men, Dagny observes, the oil would "become primeval ooze again" (246). The same point applies to the static electricity in the air, which due to Galt's genius, replaces oil as a source of power for the residents of the valley. The point applies even to the wild berries picked by a primitive hunter-gatherer, as Rand points out:

Man could not survive even as an herbivorous creature by picking fruit and berries at random. He has no instinct to tell him which plants are beneficial to him and which are a deadly poison. He can learn it only by conscious experimentation or by the observation of other living creatures who do not touch poisonous plants—a procedure which, in either case, is a process of thought.<sup>27</sup>

Galt makes this same point more succinctly in *Atlas Shrugged*, when he says that man "cannot obtain his food without a knowledge of food and of the way to obtain it" (1012).

We can appreciate, now, why Francisco describes the mind as the "root of all the goods produced and of all the wealth that has ever existed on earth" (410). All goods, from gold, to land, to food, to oil, to technology, are created by applying reason to the problem of survival, in the way that is most obvious in the case of sophisticated technologies, and they cease to be useful

and, in most cases, even to exist unless reason is constantly employed to maintain and utilize them.

The recognition that we need reason to produce, maintain, and utilize the goods necessary for survival dates back at least to ancient Greece, but the form in which this view is presented in *Atlas Shrugged* is both strikingly modern and distinctive to Rand. To see how, it is instructive to begin by considering briefly some of what the Greeks had to say on this issue.<sup>28</sup> Plato recounts the myth that Prometheus bestowed mankind with “vocational wisdom,” after his brother Epimetheus neglected to provide us with a means of survival.<sup>29</sup> And Aristotle, in the first book of his *Politics*, details the role in human survival of such vocations as hunting, agriculture, animal husbandry, and household management. The word I’m translating “vocation” here is *technê* (the root of our word technology); it amounts to knowledge of how to produce something.<sup>30</sup>

The Greeks saw a significant divide between the sort of reasoning involved in the vocations and the “theoretical” reasoning involved in the sciences (including, especially, philosophy and mathematics).<sup>31</sup> The sciences were more intellectually demanding but their discoveries seemed not to make any significant contribution to production. Instead, they were experienced as containing their own reward in the form of a sense of exercising one’s mind to the utmost, which the philosophers regarded as an end in itself—something that has value intrinsically, quite apart from its relation to the rest of life.

By contrast, little intellectual satisfaction was to be found in the vocations, which, though they did require some thinking, were more labor intensive than any job in the modern world. It is significant in this connection that the Greeks did not see the vocations as involving the discovery of *new* methods of production. What Prometheus handed down to man were complete (or nearly complete) bodies of knowledge, which needed only to be applied, and this application consisted largely in tedious (and often excruciating) manual labor. Thus, while theoretical reasoning was engaged in for its own sake, the vocations were practiced only for the material rewards they yielded (and indeed, they were most often practiced by slaves, who had no choice in the matter).

We have here a dichotomy between theoretical reasoning, which is seen as useless but intrinsically valuable, and productive reasoning, which is valued only for its effects. Theoretical reason, which is reason in the fullest sense, aims at truth, whereas productive reason, which is barely reason at all, aims at profit or sustenance. Thus the alleged impracticality of theoretical reasoning came to be seen as ennobling it, and the utility of productive reason as debasing it.

This attitude, which persists to this day, is represented in *Atlas Shrugged* by a number of characters. Among these is the bum who Dagny encounters in a slum diner:

Man’s only talent is an ignoble cunning for satisfying the needs of his body. No intelligence is required for that. Don’t believe the stories about man’s mind, his spirit, his ideals, his sense of unlimited ambition. . . . Spirit? There’s no spirit involved in manufacturing or in sex. Yet these are man’s only concerns. Matter—that’s all men know or care about. As witness our great industries—the only accomplishment of our alleged civilization—built by vulgar materialists with the aims, the interests and the moral sense of hogs. It doesn’t take any morality to turn out a ten-ton truck on an assembly line. (177)

Morality, he thinks, is “judgment to distinguish right and wrong, vision to see the truth, courage to act upon it, dedication to that which is good, integrity to stand by the good at any price” all traits associated with scientists and philosophers, but not with practitioners of vocations.

The novel's most significant exponent of the distinction between theoretical and productive reasoning is Robert Stadler.<sup>32</sup> We can see this in his responses to the two most significant technological achievements in the novel, Rearden Metal and Galt's motor. He calls the first "an excellent piece of smelting" which he regards as of negligible value when compared to the State Science Institute, "the last center of science left on earth, and the whole future of human knowledge" (190). Notice that Rearden Metal is a significant scientific achievement, which gives the lie to Stadler's claim that the State Science Institute is the *last* center of science. Stadler does not count Rearden's laboratories as centers of science precisely because they have a productive purpose. And in describing the metal as a "piece of smelting" he treats it as though it were a mere application of the ancient vocation of blacksmithing.<sup>33</sup> The new discovery involved in Galt's motor is too profound for Stadler to ignore or minimize, but consider what he says in response to it:

He arrived at some new concept of energy. He discarded all our standard assumptions, according to which his motor would have been impossible. He formulated a new premise of his own and he solved the secret of converting static energy into kinetic power. Do you know what *that* means? Do you realize what a feat of pure, abstract science he had to perform before he could make his motor? . . . Did you say you found this in the research laboratory of a plain, commercial motor factory? . . . A man with the genius of a great scientist, who chose to be a commercial inventor? I find it outrageous. He wanted a motor, and he quietly performed a major revolution in the science of energy, just as a means to an end, and he didn't bother to publish his findings, but went right on making his motor. (355–56)

Stadler, enraptured by Galt's "pure, abstract science," is *offended* that Galt saw it as a means to a productive end. "Why," Stadler asks, "did he want to waste his mind on practical appliances?"

This question and Dagny's involuntary reply, "Perhaps because he liked living on this earth," go to the heart of Stadler's thematic role in the novel. Through the character, Rand draws out an implication of the dichotomy between theoretical and productive reasoning. If reason, in its highest functions, is useless and its value is entirely disconnected from the rest of life, then the mind—and the man of the mind—is not at home in the world. This implication was explicitly embraced by Plato, who portrayed philosophers as longing to be separated from their bodies in death.<sup>34</sup> His thesis was in part motivated by the significant mystical elements in his conception of reason; but even Aristotle, who had no patience for mysticism and was this-worldly in orientation, found it difficult to account for the place of reason in the world.<sup>35</sup> Stadler, the pure theoretical scientist who looks down on productive reasoning, is portrayed, like Plato's philosophers, as a man who does not belong on Earth. But the reason that he does not belong is, on Rand's view, not because he is a scientist as such, but because he represents a mistaken view of the role of science, and of the mind generally, in man's existence.

*Atlas Shrugged* portrays and celebrates reason as a single, unitary faculty. The differences between so-called "productive" and "theoretical" reasoning are differences in degree rather than in kind. Knowledge as such has survival-promoting applications, and because of this, even the most abstract science or mathematics qualifies as productive, even when the scientist himself does not yet know of a specific application for it. Thus theoretical reasoning differs from the deliberations of a blacksmith only in the *immediacy* of its use in the production of material values. Though the productive consequences of scientific discoveries may be less immediate,

they are ultimately greater. This point is not unique to Rand: it has found other defenders in the modern world, most famously Francis Bacon, who is reputed to have said “knowledge is power.”<sup>36</sup> There is, however, another aspect to Rand’s integrative view of reason which is uniquely hers: she ascribes to production the features long recognized as noble in abstract science, and in so doing she reconceives the nature of this nobility.

Recall the traits that the bum in the diner thought could not be found in the modern world: “vision to see the truth, courage to act upon it, dedication to that which is good, integrity to stand by the good at any price.” Notice what reason Rearden gives in the very next scene for his refusal to sell the rights to his Metal *at any price* or to be intimidated by any threat into taking it off the market: “You see, it’s because Rearden Metal is *good*” (182).<sup>37</sup> He and Dagny have the vision to see the truth about the metal, and the courage to act upon this truth, when the whole world is against them. In showing us how this vision and courage is necessary to produce the John Galt Line, *Atlas Shrugged* shows us that it is necessary for production as such.

In contrast to Stadler, Rearden is portrayed as the man who does belong on Earth—the man, Dagny thinks, “to whom the Earth belongs”—and, in his creation of Rearden Metal, we see at once the scientist dedicated to truth, and the industrialist out to make a profit by putting this truth to life-sustaining work.

Two hundred tons of metal which was to be harder than steel, running liquid at a temperature of four thousand degrees, had the power to annihilate every wall of the structure and every one of the men who worked by the stream. But every inch of its course, every pound of its pressure and the content of every molecule within it, were controlled and made by a conscious intention that had worked upon it for ten years. . . .

—the nights spent in the workshop of his home, over sheets of paper which he filled with formulas, then tore up in angry failure—. . .

—the meals, interrupted and abandoned at the sudden flash of a new thought, a thought to be pursued at once, to be tried, to be tested, to be worked on for months, and to be discarded as another failure—

—the moments snatched from conferences, from contracts, from the duties of running the best steel mills in the country, snatched almost guiltily, as for a secret love—

—the one thought held immovably across a span of ten years, under everything he did and everything he saw, the thought held in his mind when he looked at the buildings of a city, at the track of a railroad, at the light in the windows of a distant farmhouse, at the knife in the hands of a beautiful woman cutting a piece of fruit at a banquet, the thought of a metal alloy that would do more than steel had ever done, a metal that would be to steel what steel had been to iron—

—the acts of self-racking when he discarded a hope or a sample, not permitting himself to know that he was tired, not giving himself time to feel, driving himself through the wringing torture of: “not good enough . . . still not good enough . . .” and going on with no motor save the conviction that it could be done. (29–30)

Here we see the nobility of a reason that is at home in the world—a powerful, intense reason that isn’t the luxury of aristocrat philosophers fed by slave labor (or of a State Science

Institute funded with money taxed from the productive), but a reason which is itself productive, and on a grand scale.

The scale is important: Rearden is as different as can be from the “household managers” Aristotle describes—functionaries who oversee muscular drudges in the performance of a stagnant routine. He is an innovator, who, through the work of his mind, opens up new worlds of life-sustaining possibility:

To take the pounding violence of sixteen motors, she thought, the thrust of seven thousand tons of steel and freight, to withstand it, grip it and swing it around a curve, was the impossible feat performed by two strips of metal no wider than her arm. What made it possible? What power had given to an unseen arrangement of molecules the power on which their lives depended and the lives of all the men who waited for the eighty boxcars? She saw a man’s face and hands in the glow of a laboratory oven, over the white liquid of a sample of metal. (245)

As an inventor, and so a scientist, Rearden exemplifies the productive character of the very functions of the mind that the Greeks thought were inherently impractical; and Galt does this on an even greater scale. It is in such dramatic cases of technological innovation that the error of the Greek view is most readily apparent (which is why it was not apparent to the Greeks who did not yet have any such examples to draw on).

*Atlas Shrugged* also shows us how the same intransigent devotion to truth epitomized by science is present in all productive work, from running a railroad or a steel mill to mining coal or investing in the stock market. We see its presence even in such mundane tasks as toasting bread or cooking a hamburger when they are performed *well* (176–77, 328). It is true, of course, that all of these productive endeavors require some manual labor (though nothing like the backbreaking labor with which most of mankind was occupied prior to the Industrial Revolution); but an important theme of *Atlas* is that this labor is not what is primarily responsible for the product, because it is the mind that creates the context in which the physical labor can be of value. Galt explains:

When you work in a modern factory, you are paid, not only for your labor, but for all the productive genius which has made that factory possible: for the work of the industrialist who built it, for the work of the investor who saved the money to risk on the untried and the new, for the work of the engineer who designed the machines of which you are pushing the levers, for the work of the inventor who created the product which you spend your time on making, for the work of the scientist who discovered the laws that went into the making of that product, for the work of the philosopher who taught men how to think and whom you spend your time denouncing.

The machine, the frozen form of a living intelligence, is the power that expands the potential of your life by raising the productivity of your time. If you worked as a blacksmith in the mystics’ Middle Ages, the whole of your earning capacity would consist of an iron bar produced by your hands in days and days of effort. How many tons of rail do you produce per day if you work for Hank Rearden? Would you dare to claim that the size of your pay check was created solely by your physical labor and that those rails were the product of your muscles? The

standard of living of that blacksmith is all that your muscles are worth; the rest is a gift from Hank Rearden.

Physical labor as such can extend no further than the range of the moment. The man who does no more than physical labor, consumes the material value-equivalent of his own contribution to the process of production, and leaves no further value, neither for himself nor others. But the man who produces an idea in any field of rational endeavor—the man who discovers new knowledge—is the permanent benefactor of humanity. Material products can't be shared, they belong to some ultimate consumer; it is only the value of an idea that can be shared with unlimited numbers of men, making all sharers richer at no one's sacrifice or loss, raising the productive capacity of whatever labor they perform. It is the value of his own time that the strong of the intellect transfers to the weak, letting them work on the jobs he discovered, while devoting his time to further discoveries. (1064)

Galt's position here (and Francisco's in the passage quoted at the beginning of this section) is presented in explicit opposition to the view that wealth is essentially the product of physical labor, with its corollary that industrialists grow rich by "exploiting" their workers. This position, which was most prominently defended by Marx, is simply a twist on the Greek marginalization of productive reasoning applied (preposterously) to an industrial society. The twist is that, where the Greeks had exalted theoretical reasoning and disdained manual labor, Marx exalted toil and dismissed as empty the theorizing that the Greeks saw as an end in itself. He regarded men's thoughts as effects of their economic circumstances and activity, describing them as "the efflux of their material behavior" and "ideological reflexes" that are "echoes of life-processes."<sup>38</sup> Galt aptly dubs this position "mysticism of muscle," because it views knowledge not as something that must be achieved through a process of self-directed reasoning, but as something that arises in us passively as a byproduct of manual labor, which we somehow *just know* how to perform. Lee Hunsacker speaks for this view when he says:

Any enlightened person knows that man is made by the material factors of his background, and that a man's mind is shaped by his tools of production. But people wouldn't wait for the laws of economic determinism to operate upon us. We never had a motor factory before. We had to let the tools condition our minds, didn't we? (320)<sup>39</sup>

It is because tools cannot condition a mind that the factory closes; and in the absence of a mind competent to understand its nature and value, Galt's motor, the greatest of all tools, rusts while the mindless residents of Starnesville sink into a life of true toil. This is only one of the many episodes in the novel that dramatize the falsehood of the mysticism of muscle. One further example will suffice, both to convey this point and to underscore the mind's role as the productive faculty. Consider how Rand describes the relay room in the Taggart Terminal, and Dagny's thoughts concerning it, after the interlocker system has failed:

Through the open door of the relay room, she saw the tower men standing grimly idle—the men whose jobs had never permitted a moment's relaxation—standing by the long rows that looked like vertical copper pleats, like shelves of books and as much of a monument to human intelligence. The pull of one of the small

levers, which protruded like bookmarks from the shelves, threw thousands of electric circuits into motion, made thousands of contacts and broke as many others, set dozens of switches to clear a chosen course and dozens of signals to light it, with no error left possible, no chance, no contradiction—an enormous complexity of thought condensed into one movement of a human hand to set and insure the course of a train, that hundreds of trains might safely rush by, that thousands of tons of metal and lives might pass in speeding streaks a breath away from one another, protected by nothing but a thought, the thought of the man who devised the levers. But they—she looked at the face of her signal engineer—they believed that that muscular contraction of a hand was the only thing required to move the traffic—and now the tower men stood idle—and on the great panels in front of the tower director, the red and green lights, which had flashed announcing the progress of trains at a distance of miles, were now so many glass beads—like the glass beads for which another breed of savages had once sold the Island of Manhattan. (951–52)

Without the interlocker, the trains must be directed manually, by an army of men with lanterns, following written orders, a process that “will take hours to do what used to take minutes” (953). In response to the signal master’s surprise, Dagny says:

“Yes, brother! Now why should *you* be shocked? Man is only muscles, isn’t he? We’re going back—back to where there were no interlocking systems, no semaphores, no electricity—back to the time when train signals were not steel and wire, but men holding lanterns. Physical men, serving as lampposts. You’ve advocated it long enough—you got what you wanted. Oh, you thought that your tools would determine your ideas? But it happens to be the other way around—and now you’re going to see the kind of tools your ideas have determined!”

But even to go back took an act of intelligence—she thought, feeling the paradox of her own position, as she looked at the lethargy of the faces around her. (952)

## THE VALUING FACULTY

In discussing reason’s role in production, we focused on what philosophers call “instrumental reasoning”—that is, calculating the means necessary to achieve an end. To return to our last example, Dagny sought to move trains through the Taggart Terminal, and figured out *how* to do it. The broken interlocking system, a product of reason, was likewise devised as a *means* to this end. Again, consider the ten-year long process by which Rearden designed his Metal. There was something he sought—a metal with certain properties—and he thought about the means of creating it. However, Rand maintained that reason is responsible for determining our ends as well as our means.<sup>40</sup>

Before taking up *Atlas Shrugged’s* treatment of this point, it will be instructive to briefly consider it independently of the novel. We can begin by imagining the content of an animal’s consciousness. Take the case of a tiger on the hunt: he is seeking his prey, and in some manner—perhaps in the form of an image—he must be aware of this goal. In this way, the tiger can consciously pursue the prey or a mate, but he cannot consciously pursue good nutrition or parenthood as such; much less can he consciously pursue life or any particular sort of life. The

tiger's consciousness is limited to the perceptual level, and he cannot project goals that cannot be perceived. Because his life as a whole is outside the range of his consciousness, he cannot consciously pursue or direct it. Its direction is provided by genetically programmed desires or learned habits that nonconsciously cause him to be motivated to pursue various perceptible goals and to take various concrete actions, which, unbeknownst to him, cohere into a self-sustaining way of life. Thus, as Rand explains,

an animal's life consists of a series of separate cycles, repeated over and over again, such as the cycle of breeding its young, or of storing food for the winter; an animal's consciousness cannot integrate its entire lifespan; it can carry just so far, then the animal has to begin the cycle all over again, with no connection to the past. *Man's* life is a continuous whole: for good or evil, every day, year and decade of his life holds the sum of all the days behind him.<sup>41</sup>

A man can—and, indeed, must—project goals that are outside of the range of his perceptual awareness. He must *conceive purposes*, holding them in mind over a span of time, directing himself toward them. Think, for example of how Rearden held “the one thought” of his metal “immovably across a span of ten years, under everything he did and everything he saw” (30). Further, man can integrate his purposes into wider and wider values, to be pursued over longer and longer expanses of time, culminating in a conception of his life as a whole, as a value to be achieved and maintained. Thus Rearden, seeing the neon sign above his mills as he walks home after pouring the first heat of his Metal, thinks of the other neon signs in different parts of the country reading “Rearden Ore—Rearden Coal—Rearden Limestone” and wishes “it were possible to light a neon sign above them, saying: Rearden Life” (32): each sign represents a value achieved, and he conceives of his life as an ever-growing sum of such achievements.

A purpose conceived and pursued over time is a *value* in the sense in which that term is properly applicable to man. Galt, in his speech, defines a value as “that which one acts to gain and keep” (1012), and there is a sense in which a man chasing after something in the short-range manner of an animal might be said to be pursuing a value; but human beings cannot survive in this manner, nor can they even find such values desirable, except in a context where they see them contributing to further values. Whereas an animal is motivated to pursue certain perceptible things by innate desires, all of man's desires derive from the purposes he has chosen.

This difference between men and animals is highlighted in Dagny's thoughts, during her stay in Woodstock. Having quit the railroad, which has been her central purpose in life since she was a child, she retreats to the country to regroup; with nothing else to do, she finds herself rebuilding the path from her cabin.

The work gave her the calm needed; she had not noticed how she began it or why; she had started without conscious intention, but she saw it growing under her hands, pulling her forward, giving her a healing sense of peace. Then she understood that what she needed was the motion to a purpose, no matter how small or in what form, the sense of an activity going step by step to some chosen end across a span of time. The work of cooking a meal was like a closed circle, completed and gone, leading nowhere. But the work of building a path was a living sum, so that no day was left to die behind her, but each day contained all those that preceded it, each day acquired its immortality on every succeeding tomorrow. A circle, she thought, is the movement proper to physical nature, they

say that there's nothing but circular motion in the inanimate universe around us, but the straight line is the badge of man, the straight line of a geometrical abstraction that makes roads, rails and bridges, the straight line that cuts the curving aimlessness of nature by a purposeful motion from a start to an end. The cooking of meals, she thought, is like the feeding of coal to an engine for the sake of a great run, but what would be the imbecile torture of coaling an engine that had no run to make? It is not proper for man's life to be a circle, she thought, or a string of circles dropping off like zeros behind him—man's life must be a straight line of motion from goal to farther goal, each leading to the next and to a single growing sum, like a journey down the track of a railroad, from station to station. (609)

A tiger would not experience the process of acquiring food when he had no further purpose as an “imbecile torture,” because his awareness does not reach beyond the meal. The direction of his life and the place of the meal in it is set for him by nonconscious mechanisms. For Dagny, whose consciousness does reach further, the meal can only be a value as a means to or part of something more. And she must conceive and choose this something herself. At this point in the novel she has abandoned what had been her central purpose in life and, because of certain philosophical confusions, is unable to choose another one.<sup>42</sup> It is for this reason that she can find no joy in such short-range goals as preparing a meal. (Notice how she delights in this very same task, later in the novel, when cooking for Galt in the valley [774–75].)

Dagny's mind is fiercely active, and she experiences her lack of a purpose during her time in Woodstock as an unbearable departure from her normal way of functioning. Other characters, who lack a purpose because they are mentally passive or evasive, do not experience the lack as Dagny does, but it is nonetheless present. Such people, like the “old woman” of Starnesville, come as near as a human being can to an animal's mode of action; but they do not have the vitality that we associate with animals. Instead they drift through life without feeling the passions that even animals experience for such things as food and sex. Consider in this connection how James Taggart and Betty Pope's relationship is described:

There was no passion in it, no desire, no actual pleasure, not even a sense of shame. To them, the act of sex was neither joy nor sin. It meant nothing. They had heard that men and women were supposed to sleep together, so they did. (71)

The negative characters are similarly indifferent to money. In part III, for example, Jim absentmindedly hands a bum a hundred-dollar bill, which is “the first wad of paper” he finds in his pocket. He notices that the bum accepts the money in the same “automatic and meaningless” manner in which he gave it—“as if he would have been indifferent had he received a hundred dollars or a dime or, failing to find any help whatever, had seen himself dying of starvation within this night” (864). Over the course of the evening, Jim has “thrown dollars about by the hundreds” for “unfinished drinks,” “uneaten delicacies,” “unprovoked tips,” and such “unexpected whims” as a “long distance phone call to Argentina” to check “the exact version of a smutty story.” Reflecting on this, he realizes that “he had never cared for money” and feels a “shudder of dread” at the recognition that “he would be equally indifferent were he reduced to the state of the beggar” (867).

This indifference comes from the abdication of the mind, as Francisco explains in his speech at Taggart's wedding on “the meaning of money”:

[Money] will take you wherever you wish, but it will not replace you as the driver. It will give you the means for the satisfaction of your desires, but it will not provide you with desires. . . . Money will not purchase happiness for the man who has no concept of what he wants: money will not give him a code of values, if he's evaded the knowledge of what to value, and it will not provide him with a purpose, if he's evaded the choice of what to seek. (411)

There are two crucially connected points here. The first is that valuing as such is a *conceptual* process, which requires using one's mind to project new possibilities, and to direct oneself toward them over time. This is the case regardless of what one values. To be purposive at all, a man must be a thinker—he must have a “concept of what one wants” (though there is a certain, degenerate respect in which nonthinkers may be said to have purposes). The second point is that some purposes are rational and right and others irrational (or, at least, mistaken) and wrong: man must use his mind to discover “the knowledge of what to value.” Crucial to Rearden's valuing of Rearden Metal, for example, is his identification of it *as good*. Ultimately validating this judgment requires an explicit code of values, and later I will comment briefly on the need for such a code and reason's role in defining one. But it is possible to have values even in the absence of an explicit code, as is the case with Rearden who (initially at least) evaluates the metal as good based on his recognition of the way in which it promotes a constellation of other values that he recognizes as promoting human survival.

At present, our focus is on the role of reason in having purposes at all, and especially on the implications of this for motivation. It is by *choosing what to seek*, by projecting and committing to goals, that reason gives rise to desires and emotions, including both those drives that are thought to be innate, such as sexual passion and the desire to live, and those profound values that give shape and meaning to one's life and generate one's deepest emotional responses. In its capacity as the valuing faculty—and specifically the faculty that gives rise to values of this second sort—the mind is the *spirit* or *soul*. Just as there is a dichotomy, rejected by *Atlas Shrugged*, between theoretical and productive reason, so there is a dichotomy between spiritual values and bodily desires. The former, which are more often attributed to some mystical faculty than to reason, include moral and aesthetic values and love; the latter, desires for sex, food, and creature comforts. The spiritual values are supposed to be sublime and bodily desires debased—an attitude we witnessed earlier in the person of the bum who attributes technology to man's “ignoble cunning for satisfying the needs of his body”:

There isn't any human spirit. Man is just a low-grade animal, without intellect, without soul, without virtues or moral values. An animal with only two capacities: to eat and to reproduce. . . . You go through life looking for beauty, for greatness, for some sublime achievement, and what do you find? A lot of trick machinery for making upholstered cars or inner-spring mattresses. (177)

It does not occur to the bum that there may be anything sublime or spiritual in creating an innerspring mattress (or in maintaining a transcontinental railroad) because such accomplishments are related to bodily needs, and he conceives of spiritual values as independent of, and higher than, bodily concerns.

In opposition to the spirit-body dichotomy, *Atlas Shrugged* maintains that bodily desires and pleasures are expressions of spiritual values, and that spiritual values must be given expression in material form. The novel's most extended treatment of the unity between spirit and

body, especially as regards the spiritual character of bodily pleasures and desires, occurs in connection with Rearden, whose initial acceptance of the spirit-body dichotomy leads him to damn himself for his sexual desire for Dagny (254). Through his affair with her and friendship with Francisco he comes first to appreciate the spiritual nature of material production, and then to grasp that “my mind and my body [are] a unit,” that sex is “an experience of superlative joy to unite my flesh and my spirit,” and that his desire for her “did not come from the sight of her body, but from the knowledge that the lovely form I saw, did express the spirit I was seeing” (564). In the course of this development he learns how to enjoy his wealth, and realizes that there is a “vicious and very important” “perversion” in the idea that it is mindless playboys who are the real enjoyers of material pleasures (371).<sup>43</sup>

Dagny understands these points from the beginning, but some of the novel’s most dramatic expressions of them occur in the narrations of her thoughts. We can see clearly the novel’s position on the relation of sexual desire to spiritual values as she struggles against an overpowering desire for Galt:

as she lay in bed in the darkness of her room, unable to think or to sleep—and the moaning violence that filled her mind seemed only a sensation of her muscles, but its tone and its twisting shades were like a pleading cry, which she knew, not as words, but as pain: Let him come here, let him break—let it be damned, all of it, my railroad and his strike and everything we’ve lived by!—let it be damned, everything we’ve been and are!—he would, if tomorrow I were to die—then let me die, but tomorrow—let him come here, be it any price he names, I have nothing left that’s not for sale to him any longer—is this what it means to be an animal?—it does and I am. . . . She lay on her back, her palms pressed to the sheet at her sides, to stop herself from rising and walking into his room, knowing that she was capable even of that. . . . It’s not I, it’s a body I can neither endure nor control. . . . But somewhere within her, not as words, but as a radiant point of stillness, there was the presence of the judge who seemed to observe her, not in stern condemnation any longer, but in approval and amusement, as if saying: Your body?—if he were not what you know him to be, would your body, bring you to this?—why is it *his* body that you want, and no other?—do you think that you are damning them, the things you both have lived by?—are you damning that which you are honoring in this very moment, by your very desire? . . . She did not have to hear the words, she knew them, she had always known them. . . . After a while, she lost the glow of that knowledge, and there was nothing left but pain and the palms that were pressed to the sheet—and the almost indifferent wonder whether he, too, was awake and fighting the same torture. (780–81)

Dagny’s desire for Galt is intense and intensely physical, but it stems from her deepest spiritual values and her recognition of his—from the *things they have lived for*. Throughout the novel we see how sexual passion is a result of such values, and how the characters, like James Taggart and Betty Pope, who lack such values do not experience intense sexual desires or find any joy in sex.

The mere physical sensation of an orgasm, taken in isolation, may be pleasant, but such tactile pleasures alone do not account for the superlative joy we take in sex or the painful intensity with which we sometimes desire it. Rather the tactile pleasures are a form in which we experience spiritual values:

It was not the pressure of a hand that made her tremble; but the instantaneous sum of its meaning, the knowledge that it was *his* hand, that it moved as if her flesh were his possession, that its movement was his signature of acceptance under the whole of that achievement which was herself—it was only a sensation of physical pleasure, but it contained her worship of him, of everything that was his person and his life [. . .] it contained her pride in herself and that it should be she whom he had chosen as his mirror, that it should be her body which was now giving him the sum of his existence, as his body was giving her the sum of hers. These were the things it contained—but what she knew was only the sensation of the movement of his hand on her breasts. (956–57)

The same point applies to luxuries. The flowers and lights at Dagny’s first ball do not make the occasion gay for people who have nothing to celebrate (103); and looking at the “dim sculptured beauty” of a fancy restaurant and at its patrons, Rearden notices their “look of rancorous anxiety” and “manner of self-conscious display, as if the enormous cost of their clothes and the enormous care of their grooming should have fused into splendor, but didn’t.” “They sit there, waiting for this place to give them meaning, not the other way around. . . . They are the playboys, while we’re just tradesmen, you and I. Do you realize that we’re much more capable of enjoying this place than they can ever hope to be?” (371–72). Unlike other patrons, Dagny and Rearden can enjoy the luxurious restaurant because they have values to give it meaning.

It is primarily for these values, rather than for the pleasure they take in sex or luxury items, that the spirit-body dichotomy denigrates mere “tradesmen” like Rearden and Dagny. When, earlier in the novel, under the influence of the dichotomy, he described the two of them as “a couple of blackguards” who “haven’t any spiritual goals or qualities” and care only for “material things” (87), the material things he had in mind are not sexual pleasures or creature comforts. He and Dagny were standing at the window of his office watching “silently” and “intently” the motion of a crane as it loaded the first shipment of Rearden Metal rails into a string of gondolas. Dagny pronounced the name of the metal “as if greeting a new phenomenon of nature,” and the two agreed that it is “great” and “the most important thing happening in the world today” because of “what that metal can do, what it will make possible”:

They spoke of the metal and of the possibilities which they could not exhaust. It was as if they were standing on a mountain top, seeing a limitless plain below and roads open in all directions. But they merely spoke of mathematical figures, of weights, pressures, resistances, costs.

*This* was reality, she thought, this sense of clear outlines, of purpose, or lightness, of hope. This was the way she had expected to live—she had wanted to spend no hour and take no action that would mean less than this.

She looked at him in the exact moment when he turned to look at her. They stood very close to each other. She saw, in his eyes, that he felt as she did. If joy is the aim and the core of existence, she thought, and if that which has the power to give one joy is always guarded as one’s deepest secret, then they had seen each other naked in that moment. (87)

The spirit-body dichotomy vilifies the heroes because they value nothing above the production of material goods. What Rearden Metal makes possible is such things as heavy-freight air traffic, new types of motors, durable and inexpensive chicken wire and kitchenware, and so forth. These goods are of value because they contribute to the fulfillment of “needs of the body” for such things as food and shelter, and a life around such needs is supposed to be that of a “low-grade animal” without any spiritual qualities.

We saw in the last section how reason is the root of production, and the greatest productive achievements, such as Rearden Metal, involve the fullest use of the mind. And, earlier in this section we saw that, though these achievements are our means of satisfying the bodily needs that we share with animals, the motivation involved is quite different. A tiger in pursuit of his prey is acting to sate an automatic urge that has come over him, but there is no such automatic desire to create a new metal. That goal itself is a value that Rearden conceived and chose; and, like the pleasure he takes in the taste of expensive wine (372), the sight of Hawaiian Torch Ginger on a winter’s day (368), or the feeling of Dagny’s “slender, sensitive body” trembling under his fingers (309), his enjoyment of the metal is an expression of his spirit.

Dagny first formulates this point to herself, in the moment of her greatest achievement, as she rides in the cab on the first run of the John Galt Line. The narration of her thoughts, from which I quote at length, gives what I think is the novel’s most eloquent expression of the relation between spirit and body:

The glass sheets of the cab’s windows made the spread of the fields seem vaster: the earth looked as open to movement as it was to sight. Yet nothing was distant and nothing was out of reach. She had barely grasped the sparkle of a lake ahead—and in the next instant she was beside it, then past.

It was a strange foreshortening between sight and touch, she thought, between wish and fulfillment, between—the words clicked sharply in her mind after a startled stop—between spirit and body. First, the vision—then the physical shape to express it. First, the thought—then the purposeful motion down the straight line of a single track to a chosen goal. Could one have any meaning without the other? Wasn’t it evil to wish without moving—or to move without aim? Whose malevolence was it that crept through the world, struggling to break the two apart and set them against each other?

She shook her head. She did not want to think or to wonder why the world behind her was as it was. She did not care. She was flying away from it, at the rate of a hundred miles an hour. She leaned to the open window by her side, and felt the wind of the speed blowing her hair off her forehead. She lay back, conscious of nothing but the pleasure it gave her.

Yet her mind kept racing. Broken bits of thought flew past her attention, like the telegraph poles by the track. Physical pleasure?—she thought. This is a train made of steel . . . running on rails of Rearden Metal . . . moved by the energy of burning oil and electric generators . . . it’s a physical sensation of physical movement through space . . . but is that the cause and the meaning of what I now feel? . . . Do they call it a low, animal joy—this feeling that I would not care if the rail did break to bits under us now—it won’t—but I wouldn’t care, because I have experienced this? A low, physical, material, degrading pleasure of the body? . . .

She did not want to think, but the sound of thought went on, like the drone of the motors under the sounds of the engine. She looked at the cab around her.

The fine steel mesh of the ceiling, she thought, and the row of rivets in the corner, holding sheets of steel sealed together—who made them? The brute force of men’s muscles? Who made it possible for four dials and three levers in front of Pat Logan to hold the incredible power of the sixteen motors behind them and deliver it to the effortless control of one man’s hand?

These things and the capacity from which they came—was this the pursuit men regarded as evil? Was this what they called an ignoble concern with the physical world? Was this the state of being enslaved by matter? Was this the surrender of man’s spirit to his body?

She shook her head, as if she wished she could toss the subject out of the window and let it get shattered somewhere along the track. She looked at the sun on the summer fields. She did not have to think, because these questions were only details of a truth she knew and had always known. Let them go past like the telegraph poles. The thing she knew was like the wires flying above in an unbroken line. The words for it, and for this journey, and for her feeling, and for the whole of man’s earth, were: It’s so simple and so right! (240–42)

She recognizes that the pleasure she takes in the feeling of the wind through her hair, is due not to the feeling itself but to what it means to her; it is the physical sensation of the achievement of a great value. She has worked tirelessly for months against great odds to bring the John Galt Line into existence. She thinks the Line will save Colorado and, with it, the country and the railroad to which she has devoted her life; so the Line’s success represents the triumph of her view of life against the sense of futility and despair that have become the leitmotif of the culture.

Her view of life is summed up in the “single absolute” with which she later tells Galt she has held since childhood: “that the world was mine to shape in the image of my highest values and never to be given up to a lesser standard, no matter how long or hard the struggle” (812).<sup>44</sup> And the swift motion of the train symbolizes the process of shaping the world in the image of one’s values: one sees a goal ahead, moves purposefully toward it, and then reaches it. A value is “that which one acts to gain and keep” (1012), and so requires action toward it. But our actions are bodily, and to gain a value is to bring it into physical reality—to reshape the world in its image. Any alleged value that cannot be given “physical shape” or expression cannot be acted for and is a contradiction in terms. And, as Galt explains in his speech, anyone who doesn’t act to give his values “expression in material form” is “a cheap little hypocrite” whose “existence is unrelated to his convictions” (1029). Productive work is the epitome of valuing. Galt defines it, echoing Dagny’s words, as: “the process by which man’s consciousness controls his existence, a constant process of acquiring knowledge and shaping matter to fit one’s purpose, of translating an idea into physical form, of remaking the earth in the image of one’s values” (1020). Far from “being enslaved by matter” or “surrendering his spirit to his body,” the person who devotes his life to production takes mastery over matter and makes the world his own.

The values alleged to be nonbodily and superior to the productive purposes to which Dagny and Rearden devote their lives fall into two categories. Some are legitimate values that have been thought incorrectly to be unrelated to physical survival. In this category fall art, romantic love, and the intellectual values prized by the Greeks.<sup>45</sup> The second category of values alleged to be superior to productive achievement are not values at all but the undefined ideals espoused by “mystics of spirit.”

The novel's two most prominent mystics of spirit are James Taggart and Lillian Rearden.<sup>46</sup> Lillian consistently demeans Rearden's values as "crude," "materialistic," "commercial," "sensual," and so forth, and professes devotion to the "non-commercial" or "non-material," offering no positive identification of her ideal. When asked by Rearden what "enlightened people do with their lives," she suggests that their enlightenment consists in their not attempting to do anything—"they certainly don't spend [their time] on manufacturing plumbing pipes" (302). Jim speaks of "a hunger for something much beyond" achievements such as the John Galt Line—for things that "can't be tagged or measured" or "named in materialistic words"—for "the higher realms of spirit, which man can never reach" (265). Again, he defines the phenomena of the spirit for which he longs only by stating what they are not. Galt explains:

They claim that they perceive a mode of being superior to your existence on this earth. The mystics of spirit call it "another dimension," which consists of denying dimensions. The mystics of muscle call it "the future," which consists of denying the present. To exist is to possess identity. What identity are they able to give to their superior realm? They keep telling you what it is *not*, but never tell you what it *is*. All their identifications consist of negating: God is that which no human mind can know, they say—and proceed to demand that you consider it knowledge—God is non-man, heaven is non-earth, soul is non-body, virtue is non-profit, A is non-A, perception is non-sensory, knowledge is non-reason. Their definitions are not acts of defining, but of wiping out. (1035)

A value that is not rational, cannot be given material expression, and cannot be achieved, is a contradiction in terms, and the claim that there are such self-contradictory values is simply an attempt to *evade* the necessity of conceiving and pursuing rational values and the existence of those who do so.

Jim Taggart and Lillian are among the true villains of *Atlas Shrugged*, the conscious mystics and inveterate evaders. I mentioned earlier that such characters develop a special, perverse form of motivation centered around an antipathy toward existence and values as such. For them mystical pseudo-values are an instrument of destruction, a means to tear down genuine values.<sup>47</sup> But the acceptance of mystical values is not always motivated by such vicious motives. Consider, for example, how the disillusioned bum Dagny meets in the slum diner is described:

His gaunt face, with staring eyes and shrunken features that had been delicate, still retained a trace of distinction. He looked like the hulk of an evangelist or a professor of esthetics who had spent years in contemplation in obscure museums. She wondered what had destroyed him, what error on the way could bring a man to this. (177)

The error that destroyed the man is the acceptance of mystical pseudo-values, and the tone of description suggests that the error was venial and that his destruction is tragic, whereas Jim Taggart's is not. Dagny sums up the effect the acceptance of such pseudo-values would have on a man nicely when she contrasts her love of electric lights with "what others claimed to feel at the sight of the stars." The lights represent an achievable goal—"the aspiration drawing her upon her upward course," with the earth as "the height that she wanted to reach." By contrast, because the stars are "safely distant by millions of years," they impose no "obligation to act," but serve "as the tinsel of futility" (691). This sense of futility and resigned hopelessness, represented by the question "Who is John Galt?" is pervasive in the world of *Atlas Shrugged* and sadly prevalent

in the world in which we live. So too are feelings of guilt experienced by productive men, such as Rearden, who, because they give credence to a mystical standard, mistakenly impugn the values to which they devote their lives.

What mysticism mandates is the sacrifice of one's values—the goals that one has rationally projected and is pursuing in action—to undefined pseudo-ends that cannot be achieved or even pursued. In denying that reason is the source of values and that values are achievable on Earth, mysticism erects an imposter code of values. The possibility of such an aberration and the havoc it can wreak even on the lives of honest men, underscores the need for a rationally defined code of values—a *morality of reason*, which, unlike mystical codes, is based on and consistent with the facts that give rise to the phenomenon of valuing. Though the content of this morality is too large a topic to take up in the short space remaining, it is necessary to say a little bit about its function in life, in order to complete our sketch of *Atlas Shrugged's* theme.<sup>48</sup>

In her nonfiction Rand defines a "morality" as "a code of values to guide . . . the choices and actions that determine the purpose and course of [man's] life," and "ethics" as the "science" charged with "discovering and defining such a code."<sup>49</sup> What morality specifies is not such concrete values as who to love or what career to pursue, but rather the broad principles by which one can assess such concrete values. It performs the function that, in animals, is served by the innate desires that direct them toward certain things and away from others and so make their actions cohere into a life—"a process of self-sustaining and self-generated action" (1013). Like animals, man needs such direction, but possesses no innate code to provide it—a point made heartbreakingly by Cherryl Taggart:

We've always been told that human beings have such a great power of knowledge, so much greater than animals, but I—I feel blinder than any animal right now, blinder and more helpless. An animal knows who are its friends and who are its enemies, and when to defend itself. It doesn't expect a friend to step on it or to cut its throat. (890)

Cherryl has begun to realize that prevailing morality condemns as evil all the things that make life possible and elevates as virtues the traits most inimical to life, thus turning morality against man. When she realizes the full extent of this problem, believing herself to be helpless in the face of it, she takes her own life. The train of thought that leads her to this highlights the crucial role of intelligence in the formation of a morality. Observing the traffic light change from red to green,

she stood trembling, unable to move. That's how it works for the travel of one's body, she thought, but what have they done to the traffic of the soul? They have set the signals in reverse—and the road is safe when the lights are the red of evil—but when the lights are the green of virtue, promising that yours is the right-of-way, you venture forth and are ground by the wheels. All over the world, she thought—those inverted lights go reaching into every land, they go on, encircling the earth. And the earth is littered with mangled cripples, who don't know what has hit them or why, who crawl as best they can on their crushed limbs through their lightless days, with no answer save that pain is the core of existence—and the traffic cops of morality chortle and tell them that man, by his nature, is unable to walk. . . .

She could not deal with people any longer, she could not take the paths they took—but what could she say to them, she who had no words to name the thing she knew and no voice that people would hear? What could she tell them? How could she reach them all? Where were the men who could have spoken? (906–7)

The men who could have spoken are the men of the mind, who are on strike, and the strike itself is their means of “reaching them all.” In less than four months after Cheryl’s suicide, Galt speaks in a voice that everyone does hear. It takes Galt, “the sort of mind born once in a century,” to find the words to name the thing Cheryl knew—to identify that the world is perishing because of a Morality of Death and to define a Morality of Life. Galt’s moral code—The Objectivist Ethics—is based on a recognition of the nature of the mind and its role in man’s existence, and it enables the mind to play that role fully, self-confidently, and without contradiction for the first time.

But this is a topic for another occasion. I’d like to close this essay by returning once again to Dagny’s thoughts during the first run of the John Galt Line, when she first articulates the key aspects of the mind’s role that we have been discussing.

Why had she always felt that joyous sense of confidence when looking at machines?—she thought. In these giant shapes, two aspects pertaining to the inhuman were radiantly absent: the causeless and the purposeless. Every part of the motors was an embodied answer to “Why?” and “What for?”—like the steps of a life-course chosen by the sort of mind she worshipped. The motors were a moral code cast in steel.

They *are* alive, she thought, because they are the physical shape of the action of a living power—of the mind that had been able to grasp the whole of this complexity, to set its purpose, to give it form. For an instant, it seemed to her that the motors were transparent and she was seeing the net of their nervous system. It was a net of connections, more intricate, more crucial than all of their wires and circuits: the rational connections made by that human mind which had fashioned any one part of them for the first time.

They *are* alive, she thought, but their soul operates them by remote control. Their soul is in every man who has the capacity to equal this achievement. Should the soul vanish from the earth, the motors would stop, because *that* is the power which keeps them going—not the oil under the floor under her feet, the oil that would then become primeval ooze again—not the steel cylinders that would become stains of rust on the walls of the caves of shivering savages—the power of a living mind—the power of thought and choice and purpose. (246)

Here we can see all the elements we have discussed of *Atlas Shrugged’s* distinctive vision of the mind and its role in human existence. We see the mind as the source of the technology that keeps us alive, and as the setter of purposes. We see the mind as the soul or living power. It brings life to wires, metal, and primeval ooze by shaping them into the physical form of a life-sustaining value it has conceived. In like manner, man brings himself to life by exercising his power of thought and choice and purpose to set the values—the moral code—that give self-sustaining direction to his actions. This is what it means to live *as a man*. *Atlas Shrugged* shows

us both grand-scale examples of such living and “that state of living death” which is man’s only alternative to it (1015).<sup>50</sup>

## NOTES

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1. Ayn Rand, *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* (New York: Signet, 1967), 1, and “Basic Principles of Literature,” in *The Romantic Manifesto: A Philosophy of Literature* (New York: Signet, 1975), 81. In some contexts, she gave a fuller statement of the theme: “the role of the mind in man’s existence and, as a corollary, the presentation of a new code of ethics—the morality of rational self-interest” (“Is Atlas Shrugging,” in *Capitalism*, 15, and *For the New Intellectual* [New York: Signet, 1963], 88). I discuss how the novel demonstrates a new moral philosophy in my essay “Discovering Atlantis” in this volume.

2. As Allan Gottelf has pointed out to me, this broader focus is reflected in Rand’s statement of the theme as the role of the mind “in man’s *existence*” rather than “in man’s *life*.”

3. Rand identifies this as the “plot-theme” of the novel in her lectures on fiction (reprinted, in an edited form, in *The Art of Fiction: A Guide for Writers and Readers*, Tore Boeckmann ed. [New York: Plume, 2000], 18). The concept of “plot-theme,” a term coined by Rand, is explained in “Basic Principles of Literature” (*Romantic Manifesto*, 84) and *Art of Fiction*, 17. For an illuminating analysis, see also Tore Boeckmann, “*The Fountainhead* as a Romantic Novel,” in Robert Mayhew, ed., *Essays on Ayn Rand’s The Fountainhead* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2007), especially 123ff.

4. In this respect *Atlas Shrugged* is anticipated by *Anthem*, which dramatizes the “meaning of the concept ‘I’” by showing a world in which it has been eradicated and the steps by which a lone genius recaptures it. In Rand’s view, the “I” or “ego” and the “mind” are the same thing (see especially *Atlas Shrugged*, 1057). For discussion of *Anthem* from this point of view, see my “Prometheus’ Discovery: *Anthem* on Individualism and the Meaning of the Concept ‘I,’” in Robert Mayhew, ed., *Essays on Ayn Rand’s Anthem* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2005).

5. As Rand wrote in another connection: “A great deal may be learned about society by studying man; but this process cannot be reversed: nothing can be learned about man by studying society—by studying the inter-relationships of entities one has never identified or defined.” (“What Is Capitalism?,” in *Capitalism*, 15.)

6. See Michael S. Berliner, “The *Atlas Shrugged* Reviews,” and Leonard Peikoff, “Reply to Whittaker Chambers,” in the present volume.

7. In a letter to John Hospers, Rand expresses uncertainty as to whether there even are innate degrees of raw intelligence. See Michael S. Berliner, ed., *Letters of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1995), 539.

8. It is, however, a thesis of *Atlas* that one can permanently destroy one’s mind through long and consistent misuse. This is the state of people like James Taggart who Galt refers to as “teachers of the Morality of Death” and who he says “will never know who is John Galt.”

9. Galt describes this mission as follows:

I went out to become a flame-spotter. I made it my job to watch for those bright flares in the growing night of savagery, which were the men of ability, the men of the mind—to watch their course, their struggle and their agony—and to pull them out, when I knew that they had seen enough. (746)

The men Galt has in mind here are those like Rearden, Wyatt, and Dagny, and we get several indications in the novel that Galt, Francisco, and Ragnar have lists of such “future strikers” (795, 804, cf. 579, 758). But not all strikers were targeted in this manner. There are indications that when Rearden strikes, he takes with him much of his staff (most notably his secretary, Gwen Ives), though none of these people had been specifically sought out by Galt or Francisco (1000). These people and presumably many others were

invited to join the strike, whereas some equally virtuous people were not, because the strikers happened to know of them. A third, intermediate, category of striker comprises those, like Owen Kellogg and Dick McNamara, who Galt targets in order to undermine Taggart Transcontinental. These men, though likely not of sufficient stature to be on Galt's initial list of potential strikers, acquire special significance because of Dagny's reliance on them.

10. Henceforth, I will use "animal" to refer only to animals other than man.

11. This tradition should be distinguished from both the rationalist tradition (exemplified by Plato and Descartes), which holds that we have some knowledge entirely independent of the senses, and the empiricist tradition (exemplified by Locke and Hume), which held that all knowledge derives from the senses and retains an essentially sensory character, as well as from the Kantian tradition which is a synthesis of these two and maintains that the objects we know are constructed by the mind out of sensory material in accordance with innate structuring principles.

12. Rand repeated this definition, speaking in her own voice, in her 1960 talk "Faith and Force" (reprinted in *Philosophy: Who Needs It* [New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1982; Signet paperback edition, 1984]). In later writings, she dropped the word "perceives," defining reason as "the faculty that identifies and integrates the material provided by man's senses." (See especially "The Objectivist Ethics," in *The Virtue of Selfishness: A New Concept of Egoism* [New York: New American Library, 1964].). Most likely the change was made because it came to Rand's attention that the initial formulation could be taken to mean that there is reasoning involved in the process of sense-perception itself, a view that she rejected. For further discussion of this issue see my chapter "The Objectivist Epistemology" in Allan Gotthelf and Gregory Salmieri, eds., *Ayn Rand: A Companion to Her Works and Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, forthcoming).

13. Rand presents her theory of concepts in *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*. Further exposition and elaboration can be found in Leonard Peikoff, *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1991), chapters 3–5, my "Objectivist Epistemology," and Allan Gotthelf's unpublished paper "Ayn Rand on Concepts: Another Approach to Abstraction and Essence."

14. "Objectivist Ethics," 22.

15. I discuss Rearden and Dagny's developing thinking in some detail in my other contribution to this volume, "Discovering Atlantis." Cherryl's thought is narrated across part III, chapter IV; see especially pp. 873–83 and 900–8. We see Eddie's thoughts in the novel's opening scene (3–7) and he expresses them throughout the novel in his conversations with Galt and with Dagny.

16. Similar characters include the storekeeper in Woodstock, with whom Dagny deals during her stay there (610), and the members of Cherryl Taggart's family (on which, see 261). None of these characters seek to improve their lots in life, because doing so would require conceiving of an alternative to the status quo, and that would require a sort of mental exertion that, after a lifetime of passivity, would be unnatural to them (and perhaps impossible).

17. "Objectivist Ethics," 22.

18. See, for example, "Objectivist Ethics," 20, "The 'Conflicts' of Men's Interests" (in *Virtue of Selfishness*), 59, "Philosophy and Sense of Life" (in *Romantic Manifesto*), 26, and "Our Cultural Value Deprivation" (in *The Voice of Reason: Essays in Objectivist Thought*, Leonard Peikoff ed. [New York: New American Library, 1989; paperback edition, Meridian, 1990]), 102. For further discussion, see Peikoff, *Objectivism*, 61.

19. There is helpful discussion of this point in Harry Binswanger's lectures on *Free Will* from the 1999 Second Renaissance Conference in Lake Tahoe (recording of which are available from the Ayn Rand Bookstore).

20. Such fog imagery occurs also in connection with Lillian Rearden, in whose eyes Hank sees "not the look of understanding, but of a furious refusal to understand—as if she wanted to turn the violence of her emotion into a fog screen, as if she hoped not that it would blind her to reality, but that her blindness would make reality cease to exist" (538).

21. On the psychology of evil, see Onkar Ghate's discussion of the chapter "Anti-Life" in his essay "The Part and Chapter Headings of *Atlas Shrugged*," also in the present volume (40–41, 49–50) and

Tara Smith's discussion of "The Death Premise" in her essay "No Tribute to Caesar: Good or Evil in *Atlas Shrugged*" in the present volume (280–87).

22. "Faith and Force," in *Philosophy: Who Needs It*, 85.

23. See especially 1027 and 1034–46. For discussion, see Allan Gotthelf's "Galt's Speech in Five Sentences (and Forty Questions)" in the present volume (381).

24. "Objectivist Ethics," 22–23.

25. *Capitalism*, 17.

26. It is worth noticing that an area over nine times the size would have been destroyed if Rearden had not heroically withheld Rearden Metal from the State Science Institute, when it requested it for Project X (360, 432–38). As built, the device is able to "produce rays to cover . . . the entire countryside within a radius of one hundred miles." Floyd Ferris and his goons had "the technical knowledge to build generators with a range of two and three hundred miles—but due to the fact that we were unable to obtain in time a sufficient quantity of a highly heat-resistant metal, such as Rearden Metal, we had to be satisfied with our present equipment and radius of control" (822–23). When initially asked to sell the Metal for use in the secret project, Rearden gives as one of his reasons for refusing: that "I created that Metal" and "It is my moral responsibility to know for what purpose I permit it to be used" (365). This is just the sort of responsibility defaulted on by Stadler, who does not object to his discoveries being used to create Project X. Rand discusses the responsibility of scientists in this connection in her essay "To Young Scientists," in *Voice of Reason*.

27. David Harriman, ed. *Journals of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1997), 252. The passage is from a nonfiction treatise *The Moral Basis of Individualism*, which Rand worked on in the period between *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, but never completed.

28. My treatment of the Greeks here owes a great deal to Leonard Peikoff's explanation (in an unpublished lecture on the importance of historical knowledge to philosophy) of Rand's comment that she could not have formulated her philosophy prior to the Industrial Revolution. See his briefer discussion of this issue in *Objectivism*, 195–96.

29. *Protagoras* 321d. Significantly, allusions to Prometheus figure prominently in Rand's work. Francisco describes Galt as "Prometheus who changed his mind" (517) and Equality 7-2521, the hero of *Anthem*, renames himself Prometheus at the end of the novella (Fiftieth anniversary paperback edition [New York: Signet, 1995], 115). The mythological Prometheus represents reason and is supposed to have stolen fire for man from the gods and to have been punished for this by being bound to a mountain where he was pecked at by birds of prey. Similarly, Galt and the hero of *Anthem* are paragons of reason who make a new form of energy available to mankind and suffer for having done so. But in Rand's version, unlike the myth, the suffering is caused by mankind itself; and, instead of submitting to it, the heroes (to paraphrase Francisco) withdraw their fire until the day when men withdraw their vultures (517). This point was called to my attention by Jason Rheins, who observed that Steve Ingalls, the hero of Rand's 1939 play "Think Twice" (posthumously published in Leonard Peikoff, ed., *The Early Ayn Rand: A Selection from Her Unpublished Fiction*, revised version [New York: Signet, 2005]), also creates and withdraws a new form of energy and so can be seen as a third instance of Rand's reconceiving the Prometheus myth. Rheins elaborates: "All the central protagonist-heroes in works that Rand conceived of and finished after starting *The Fountainhead* fit the Prometheus model. Rand sees in the Prometheus myth and many others an implicit recognition of society's hostility against (the men of) the mind—an identification made by Roark [*Fountainhead*, 678], whose destruction of the Cortland housing project is a similar revolt against self-sacrifice. Rand's 'New Prometheus' archetype not only emphasizes the life-giving power of reason, as some other versions of the myth had done, but also epitomizes the moral revolution of rational egoism that liberates the mind from the code of self-sacrifice."

30. In *Nicomachean Ethics* VI 4, Aristotle defines a *technê* as a "productive state involving true reason."

31. For completeness, it is worth mentioning a third category of reasoning, which both Aristotle and Plato discuss: the *practical reasoning* by which we make decisions about how to conduct our lives. Plato, especially, stresses the role of this sort of reasoning in making material possessions of value to us

(*Euthydemus* 278e-282a, *Meno* 87e-88b, cf. *Apology* 30b), and thinks that it is closely related to (or perhaps identical with) theoretical reasoning, which he regards as quite distinct from the sort involved in producing food. Aristotle treats theoretical, practical, and productive reasoning as fully distinct categories (see especially *Nicomachean Ethics* VI).

32. See Galt's reference to Stadler in his speech, 1066.

33. Similarly Lillian refers to it as "a new kind of tin" (37).

34. See especially the *Phaedo*.

35. This difficulty gives rise to a number of often-remarked-on tensions in his corpus. He is frequently tentative when discussing issues bearing on the relation of mind to life and nature; and his identification, in *Nicomachean Ethics* Book X, of the life centered around theoretical contemplation as the highest good, has seemed to many commentators to be out of tune with the loving attention paid in the rest of the treatise to a constellation of virtues and values that are associated with civic life and would seem to be relegated to a merely instrumental role in the life Aristotle ultimately advocates as best.

36. Rand often quoted approvingly Bacon's other famous dictum, that "Nature, to be commanded, must be obeyed" (*Novum Organum* Book 1, aphorism 3 [Spedding, trans.]), and once gave it as a one-sentence summation of her metaphysics (see "Introducing Objectivism," in *Voice of Reason*, 3, "Who Is the Final Authority in Ethics?" in *Voice of Reason*, 18, *For the New Intellectual*, 15, "The Metaphysical vs. the Man-Made," in *Philosophy: Who Needs It*, 25; cf. *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, 2nd ed. [New York: Meridian, 1990], 82, and "The Stimulus and the Response," in *Philosophy: Who Needs It*, 202.)

37. Francisco, in Rearden's office, makes a similar point, describing the dedication to the good that is inherent in the way Rearden runs his business and makes his Mills constitute a "material" expression of the "abstract principle" of "moral action" (451).

38. For an especially clear statement of Marx's position on this issue (from which I draw my quotes) see "Premises of the Materialist Method," in *The Materialist Conception of History* (in David McLellan, ed. *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, 2nd ed. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000], see especially 180–81).

39. Rand regarded Marxism as a form of mysticism in its methodology as well. See *For the New Intellectual*, 33–34, "The Left: Old and New" (in *Return of the Primitive* [New York: Meridian, 1999]), 169, and "To Dream the Non-Commercial Dream" (in *Voice of Reason*), 246. Marxism is based on so-called "dialectical logic," which is different from and allegedly superior to traditional Aristotelian logic in two respects: first it views thought as inherently social, whereas Aristotelian logic views it as individualistic; second, it views contradictions between premises as a necessary stage in reasoning from which we progress to new conclusions by "transcending" the contradiction. Aristotle and Rand, by contrast, maintained that contradictions arise only from missteps in one's reasoning that must be corrected by "checking your premises," so as to discover and reject the false ones. Rand interpreted appeals to dialectical reasoning as attempts to lull people into abandoning their minds and submitting to authority, and illustrated this with the characters of Simon Pritchett and Floyd Ferris (132–33, 542).

40. For an especially emphatic statement of this position, see Robert Mayhew, ed., *Ayn Rand Answers: The Best of Her Q&A* (New York: New American Library, 2005), 107. See also Darryl Wright's 2005 lecture "Ayn Rand and the History of Ethics" (available from the Ayn Rand Bookstore). Taking this statement as his point of departure, Wright gives a masterly exposition of Rand's meta-ethics and its relation to the views of several landmark thinkers.

41. "Objectivist Ethics," 26.

42. For further discussion see my "Discovering Atlantis," 226 ff.

43. See "Discovering Atlantis," 406, 416–20.

44. Galt echoes her wording in his speech, when he defines "productive work" as "the process by which man's consciousness controls his existence, a constant process of acquiring knowledge and shaping matter to fit one's purpose, of translating an idea into physical form, of remaking the earth in the image of one's values" (1020).

45. For *Atlas Shrugged's* view of the role of art in life, see 65–66 and 781–84. Rand discusses the value of art at length in *The Romantic Manifesto*.

46. Taggart and Lillian, of course, are not the source of the doctrine. They are taught by intellectuals such as Simon Pritchett, who themselves stand at the end of “a long line of men stretched through the centuries from Plato onward” (559).

47. Because they do not focus their minds, these characters have no values and so no desires in the normal, healthy sense of that term. But, even in their out-of-focus state, they cannot help but be aware in some form of their own impotence to deal with reality and of their dependence on rational men. As a result, they come to resent the world for its inhospitality to them and to hate rational men for their ability to succeed in it. Ultimately they become motivated to destroy or demean the great. This is why the only moment of enthusiasm from either Taggart or Pope during their time together comes when he tells her of his plans to “put the skids” under his sister (71), and the closest he or Lillian ever comes to sexual passion is when they sleep with one another in a pathetic, futile attempt to defile Rearden (898–900). That act satisfies a desire Jim has had all evening to “celebrate.” It is the only time in the novel when he wants to celebrate, and what he wants to celebrate is specifically the deal that will lead to the nationalization—that is, the destruction—of d’Anconia Copper (866).

48. See Darryl Wright’s “Ayn Rand’s Ethics: From *The Fountainhead* to *Atlas Shrugged*” and my “Discovering Atlantis,” both in the present volume, for a discussion of the essential ethical content of the novel and its validation.

49. “Objectivist Ethics,” 13.

50. The Anthem Fellowship for the Study of Objectivism at the University of Texas at Austin and the Ayn Rand Institute cosponsored a workshop on *Atlas Shrugged* in January of 2008 at which there was much valuable discussion of my plans for my two contributions to this volume, and of *Atlas Shrugged* more generally. Both essays are better for it, and I would like to thank Tara Smith and Debi Ghate, who both organized and participated in the event, and the other participants: Robert Mayhew, Tore Boeckmann, Yaron Brook, Onkar Ghate, and Jason Rheins. Thank you also to Allison and Jason Roth for valuable comments on a draft of the essay, to Allan Gotthelf and Harry Binswanger for discussion and comments, and to Charlotte Jarrett for some unexpected, last-minute line editing. Finally, I’d like to acknowledge the Chicago Objectivist Club, where I delivered a version of this paper in April 2008 and received valuable feedback—in particular, I’d like to thank Keith and Pari Schacht for organizing the talk; Keith also, along with Ben Bayer, had insightful comments and questions about the structure of the material.