

CHAPTER 5: VIRTUES

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

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

Virtues and Character

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

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

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

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

Rationality

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

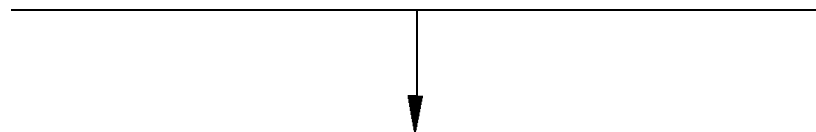
1) *Objectivity*: In Diagram 1.5 we observed that “Reason is objective

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

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

Diagram 5.1: Rationality

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



One needs a commitment to grasping reality and acting accordingly.

Virtues and Rationality

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Virtues Discussed in Chapter 5:

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

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

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

Virtues Discussed in Chapter 6:

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

values from others while avoiding or negating disvalues in society.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Integrity

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

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

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

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

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

Integrity and Principles

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

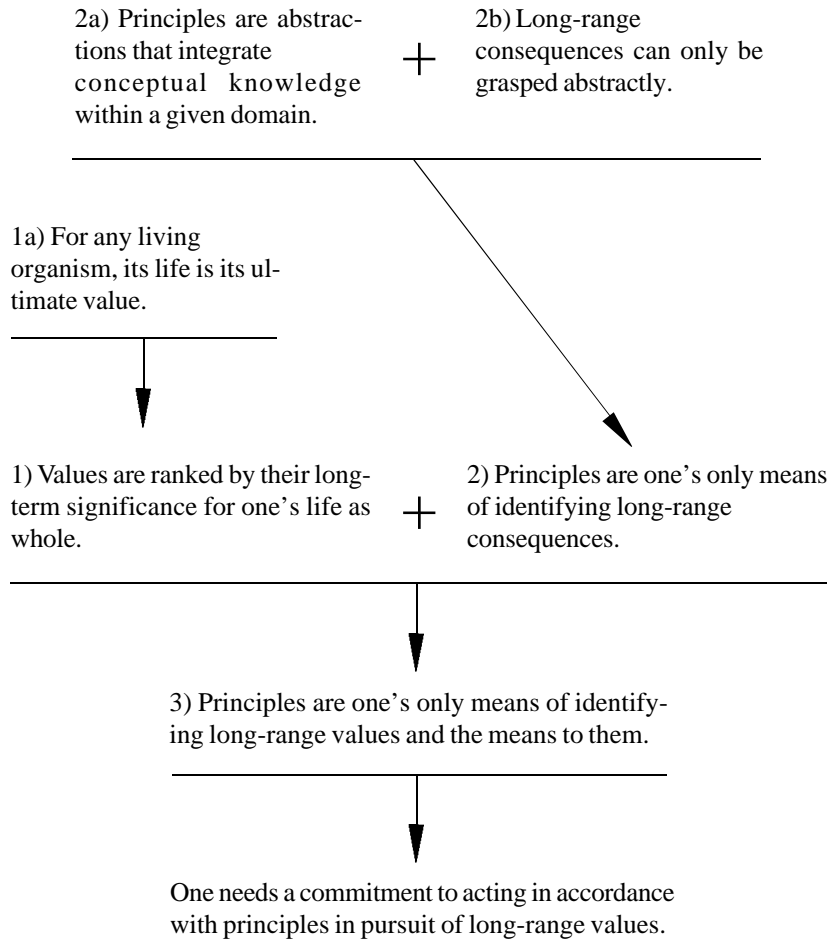
We can formulate all of our knowledge of values conceptually as principles, but of course we are also aware of short-term values through perception and feeling. For instance, when one is hungry, fresh food *smells* very attractive, and it feels delicious to eat. This is a case of perceptual awareness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

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

Diagram 5.2: Principles and Integrity

Inductive Evidence:

2b: Introspection, psychology, epistemology.



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

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

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

Character and Integrity

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

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

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

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

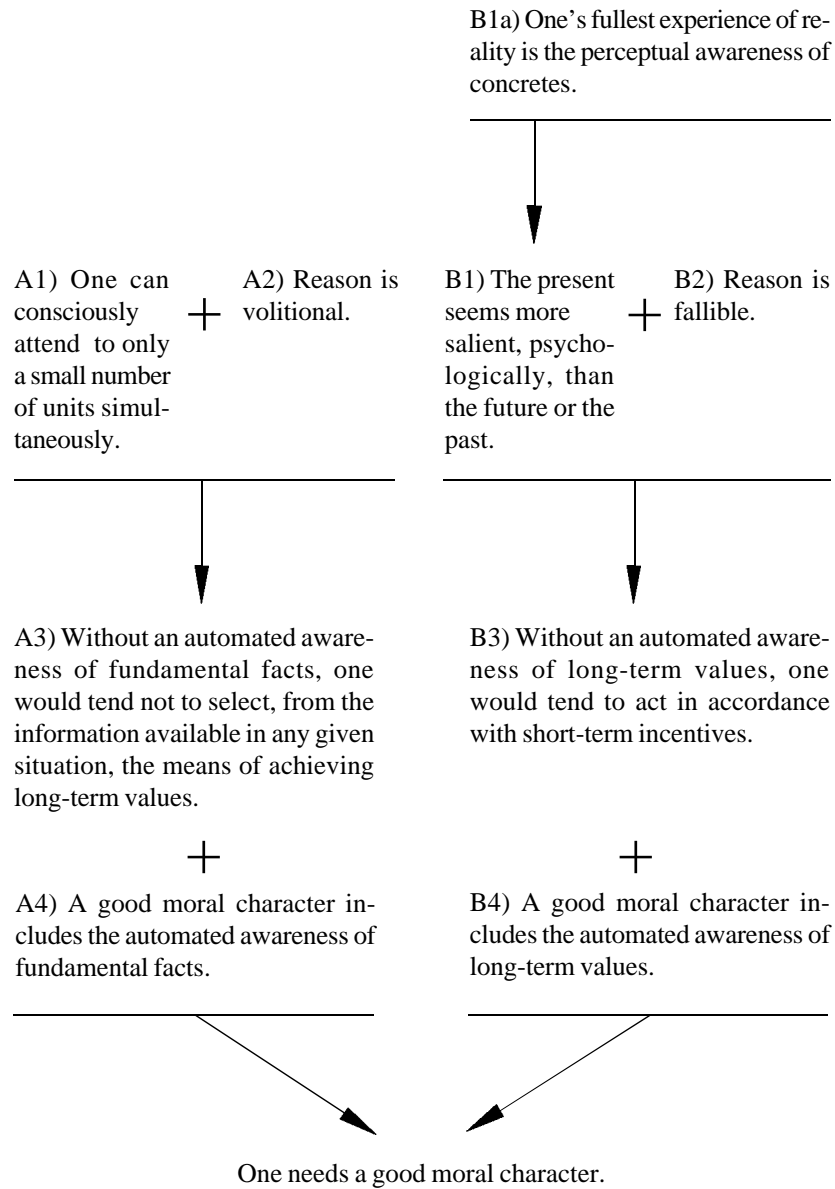
Diagram 5.3 presents two lines of argument that capture the reasons why we benefit from having a good moral character.

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

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

Diagram 5.3: Character as a Value

Inductive evidence: A4, B4) Introspection, psychology



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

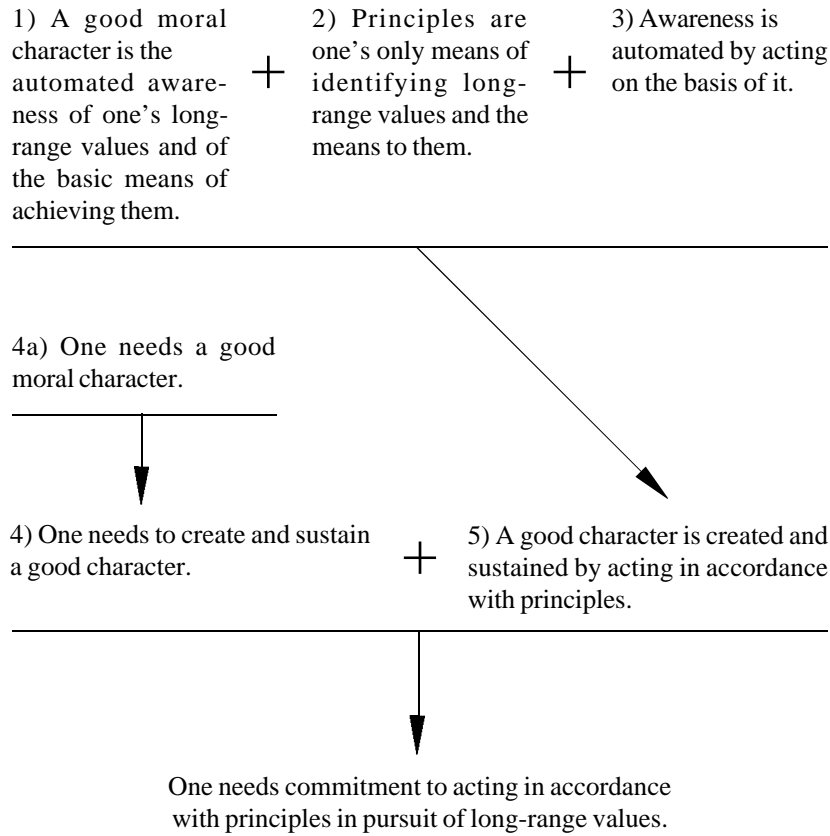
Premise 2 reminds us of the important epistemological point we employed in Diagram 5.2: **principles are one's only means of identifying long-range values and the means to them.** If one is going to develop an automated awareness of fundamental facts and long-range values (that is, a good character)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

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

Diagram 5.4: Character and Integrity

Inductive Evidence:

1, 3: Introspection, psychology



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Productiveness

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

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

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

action.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

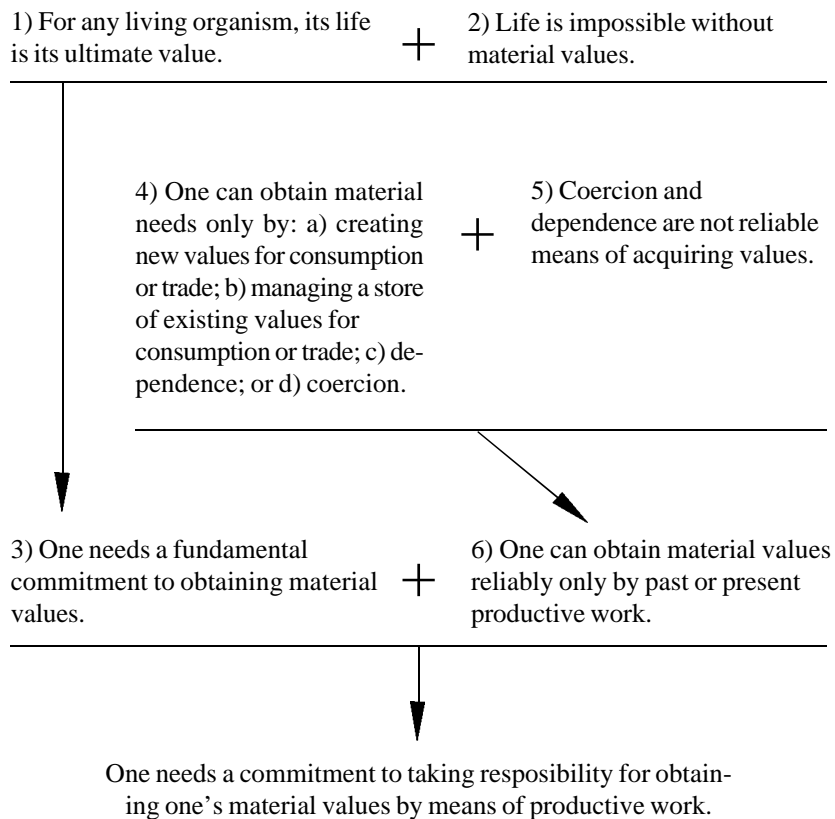
A) Material values are the most fundamental of our values in terms of logical order, because the short-run requirements of survival, such as air, shelter, medicine, and food are material. One can survive for a time, after a fashion, without art, without conscious thought (as when we sleep), without social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

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

Diagram 5.5: Productiveness and Material Values

Inductive Evidence:

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4 above.

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

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

Productive Work as One's Central Purpose

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

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

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

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

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

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

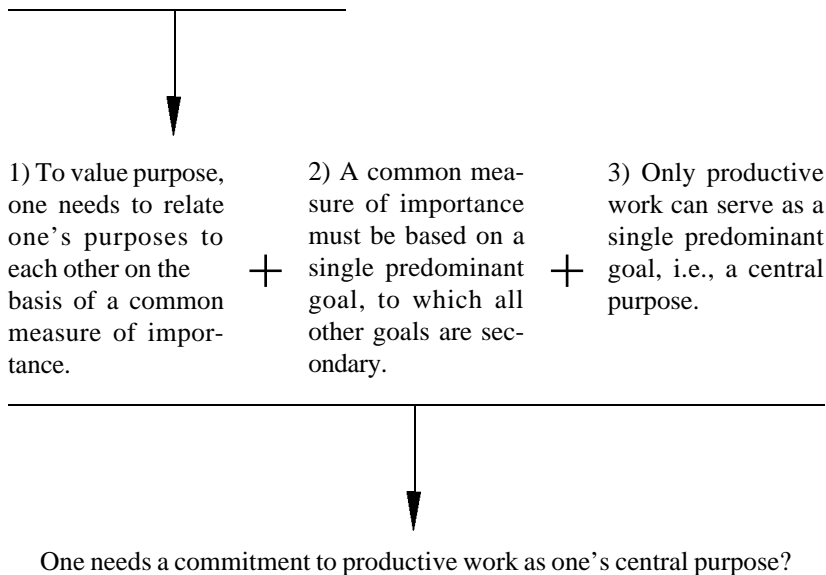
Diagram 5.6 begins our discussion of the Rand/Peikoff “central value” argument with the cardinal value of purpose. This is **Premise 1a: one needs to value purpose**. From premise 1, we can directly infer further details from the nature of the cardinal value of purpose. The inference used in this diagram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

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

Inductive Evidence

3a) This is a *false* generalization

1a) One needs to value purpose.



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Productiveness, Achievement, and Responsibility

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

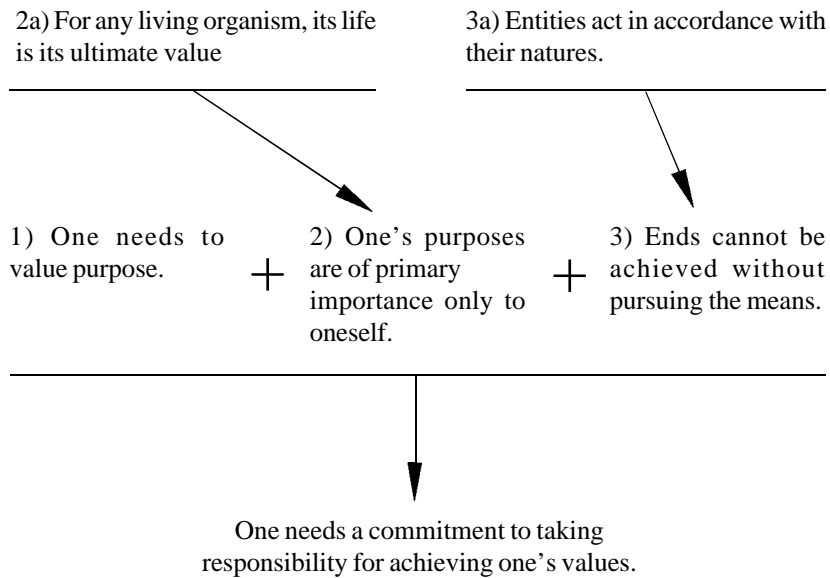
Diagram 5.7 lays out the justification of this conception of productiveness, beginning with the cardinal value of purpose.

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

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

Diagram 5.7: Productiveness and Responsibility

Inductive Evidence: No new induction



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Honesty

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

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

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

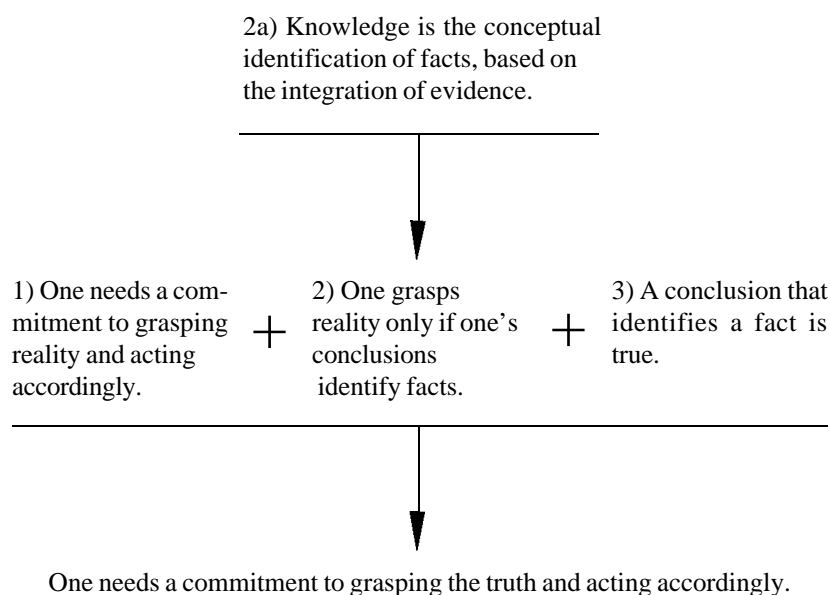
This point is what we seek to establish in Diagram 5.8 :

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

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

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

Diagram 5.8: Honesty and Rationality



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Honesty is not only a commitment not to lie to oneself, but the recognition that the truth is of greater value than any particular idea. This means one should reject ideas that contradict the facts, although it does not mean one should assume an idea is false simply because it isn't immediately confirmed in experience. Many great ideas of science have seemed implausible at first, but have been proved out by more thorough investigation. So honesty also means being open to proof, and undertaking the effort required to validate one's ideas.

Like any teleological virtue, honesty is not an a-contextual imperative; it is not a commandment to seek proof for every idea one encounters, without regard for the importance of the idea or the effort required to establish its truth or falsity. Honesty means developing the character of one who makes a priority of establishing the truth of ideas that seem important. That character will likely give one an inclination to always seek proof and to worry away at dubious notions; it is a matter of prudent allocation of one's time to decide whether the effort of attaining that proof is worthwhile. Honesty is not an easy character trait to develop, because it demands that one re-examine cherished theories and values, and that one attend carefully to the connection between one's abstract ideas and concrete facts. But it is a virtue that rewards one with clarity of mind and a profound sense of certainty. It makes one more self-consciously aware of the actual state of affairs in one's life and the wider world, and thereby mitigates any tendencies to fundamental anxiety. Every virtue enhances one's self-esteem because practicing it consists in undertaking a class of actions of great practical importance to oneself as the ultimate beneficiary. But honesty has a more profound effect: it undergirds one's self-esteem with an abiding, rational confidence in one's ability to know the truth and to choose based on that knowledge, a confidence that one needs in order to cope well with the trials one often encounters in life.³⁵ It is this confidence that gives one the strength to learn from one's mistakes, and believe in one's future prospects no matter how bleak the present. An honest person takes the "benevolent universe" premise deeply to heart, accepting the fact that the truth is always at root a boon.

What about honesty in a social context? The argument in Diagram 5.8 is quite abstract, and it does not obviously demonstrate that common dishonesty towards others is wrong. After all, what does "acting accordingly" with one's grasp of the truth amount to here? One might agree with Diagram 5.8, but argue that lying to others does not undermine reason, since one can lie, yet take responsibility for keeping the facts straight in one's own head. Lying in this view is a social issue, not a cognitive one. In movies and novels, this is how brilliant swindlers succeed: they *know* the truth; what they *say* is another matter. And of

course, anyone can experiment with speaking a few words of falsehood, and most of us have done so. We can tell the difference between what we said in those cases, and what the truth was. But there is vast difference between saying a few false words, such as “the sky is pink,” and actually attempting to sustain a falsehood in order to obtain a value.

Diagram 5.9 presents a more detailed argument for honesty that shows why lying to others in normal circumstances is not a reliable means of obtaining values. In *Atlas Shrugged*, Ayn Rand summarized this rationale for honesty by writing that:

...an attempt to gain a value by deceiving the mind of others is an act of raising your victims to a position higher than reality, where you become a pawn of their blindness, a slave of their non-thinking and evasions, while their intelligence, their rationality, their perceptiveness become the enemies you have to dread and flee.³⁶

Diagram 5.9 shows why the liar must fear the perspicacity of those he deceives, and why an attempt to gain values by deception fruitlessly subordinates one's mind to others.

Before we go through the diagram, we should note that there are three basic types of values one might seek to gain by deception.³⁷ First, one could attempt to deceive oneself, perhaps in the hope of enjoying a pleasant, sustainable, and delimited fantasy. One might say, for example, that religious faith plays the role of a pleasant fantasy in the minds of many people: they believe because without belief, the world seems darker and more hostile. Second, one might hope to defraud someone, that is, deceive him into giving up a greater value than he would have done had he known the facts. Finally, one might deceive another for his own sake, as when one hopes to boost a friend's self-esteem by exaggerating his beauty or abilities. We will treat examples from each of these types in the course of our discussion of Diagram 5.9.

Premise 1 defines deception: **Deception is a deliberate misrepresentation of facts.** But what is it about reality that makes deception dangerous?

Premise 2 supplies the information that **any fact is interconnected with other facts in reality.** This is an inductive observation of the broadest sort, and it is crucial to the rationale for the virtue of honesty. If we could easily isolate misrepresentations from everything else, then they would much less troublesome. But because things in the world affect other things, each fact, each thing we know about, is related to others. For example, imagine that we were to lie to a friend about what we were doing on Saturday night (say we went to a concert to which we should have invited him). Because facts are interrelated, we must try to keep related information from our deceived friend. We would try to avoid mentioning Saturday night or the concert in his presence, for example,

and take care not to discuss it with people he knows. But facts are interconnected in many ways: we can't easily anticipate all the ways in which the victim of our deception might come across the facts.

Diagram 5.9: Honesty and Deception

Inductive Evidence:

1: Introspection, psychology

5: Psychology, economics

1) Deception is a deliberate misrepresentation of the facts. + 2) Any fact is interconnected with other facts in reality. + 3) All conceptual knowledge is acquired by cognitive integration.

4) Deception is likely to work only to the extent that those deceived are unable or unwilling to integrate actively. + 5) To the extent that a person does not integrate actively, he will not be able to offer value.

6) Deception is not an effective means of achieving values.

One needs a commitment to grasping the truth and acting accordingly.

The interrelated nature of facts causes a problem for deception because of the the epistemological principle summarized in **Premise 3: all knowledge is acquired by cognitive integration**. This is a premise we established in diagram 1.2. The people we attempt to deceive are not passive objects, but have active minds that should normally be engaged in acquiring, integrating, and applying information. This means that **deception is likely to work only to the extent that those deceived are unable or unwilling to integrate actively**. This intermediate conclusion is **Premise 4**.

To see how premises 1, 2, and 3 fit together to give us premise 4, let's return to our example. Suppose a mutual acquaintance who attended the concert mentions to our friend that he noticed what goofy dancers we are when he saw us cutting the rug at the concert. Our friend is now likely to be deceived about our activities on Saturday only if he does not integrate this new fact with the story we told him. What if the topic of the concert comes up in conversation a week later? The circle of deception would begin to expand, involving more and more people, adapting to more and more objections.

Yet the example of our deceived friend is really a case of a trivial lie, meant to avoid a minor embarrassment. The situation becomes even more complicated if we attempt to gain a significant value through deception. If we were to lie about our accomplishments, for instance, in order to get a job or impress people, it is hard to see how we could sustain the lie over time. The more that's at stake, the more the victims have reason to pay attention for discrepancies and take the time to establish the truth. An employer, for example, will ask for a copy of a diploma, or give one's previous workplaces a call. A lie can rarely be self-contained, especially a significant lie. We can summarize this point in the form of a principle: *to sustain a deception, one must anticipate the objections of others and fabricate further misrepresentations in response*. To keep a lie going, one must constantly adjust one's story to conform to the beliefs of one's listeners. One must devote ever-increasing mental effort to remembering what lies one has told, and to making up new lies that are likely to seem plausible. In effect, one becomes embroiled in a vicious circle. This is common knowledge, reflected in the well-known couplet:

“O, what a tangled web we weave,
when first we practice to deceive!”³⁸

Notice that the thought one puts into sustaining a deception comes at the expense of thinking about real problems and facts. This is the point that Rand emphasized in writing that deception “is an act of raising your victims to a position higher than reality.”³⁹ In effect, deception compromises one's *independence*, a subject we will discuss in detail in Chapter 6. Anticipating the mental objections of others and keeping track of their idiosyncratic preferences

and contexts of knowledge are skills that it takes time and effort to develop. Acquiring them naturally comes at the price of developing skill in addressing more fundamental facts and more personal concerns. This is the situation of Peter Keating at the close of *The Fountainhead*: he has become too adept at conforming to others, and deceiving them where he can, to be competent at identifying his own needs and goals, to say nothing of achieving them. Note also that insofar as deception requires that one attempt to plausibly integrate falsehoods into one's knowledge, it is likely to have the deleterious epistemological effects that we noted in discussing diagram 5.8.

Since the practice of deception is clearly harmful to one's own cognition and character, it would have to yield more than trivial values from its victims. But a deception can only be a source of significant value if those providing the value fail to notice the discrepancies between reality and the claims of the deceiver, despite having substantial reason to do so. What sort of people are likely to think in this way? Which are likely not to practice a commitment to seeking out the truth themselves? Which are not likely to be able to see through a clever deception? The people one is likely to take in are of the sort who are not mentally active. But then, what value could hope to gain from such people?

As **Premise 5** puts it, **to the extent that a person does not integrate actively, he will not be able to offer value**. This means that deception only works with those who don't integrate: the ignorant, the irrational and the exceptionally stupid; these are the people least likely to be able to offer us value. One might say that this claim is an application of the principle that reason is man's basic means of gaining values. But it cannot be reached by deduction. Instead, it rests on a broad body of direct inductive evidence. One must look to one's experience of society and knowledge of social interactions to test its validity. It is not an obvious inductive generalization and it requires some reflection.

It is a widespread folk myth that lying can pay off. In part, this is an aspect of the romantic (or at least lucrative) light in which crime is often cast in novels and films. Many people are fascinated by idea of the successful swindler, but this may be due more to the counterfactual character of this idea than to its familiarity in practice. However, most everyone knows an anecdote or two in which a lie seems to succeed.

Sometimes a lie serves to help one preserve a value. One might lie to a mugger, for instance, about how much money one is carrying. Instances like this do not contradict Premise 5: a mugger, after all, attempts to *take* value, not offer it, and a mugger is unlikely to be a person committed to reason. However, there are cases where lies have been known to result in the acquisition of some sort of value. The question is, can one derive any consistent policy of ethics from such events? Some might argue that we need a principle on practical deception, that we can attach to Premise 5 as a "rider."

In many cases where lies seem to pay off, the victim is a party with

whom one expects to interact only once, and then anonymously. For instance: say one is in an airport, in a hurry to change planes. Airline companies give people with health problems special treatment, including whisking them about the terminal in an electric cart, yet the airline is generally not able to check or confirm whether one actually does have a disability. So, one could pretend to have a disability to get special treatment, and one's chance of discovery would be lowered by the brief nature of the encounter.

Instances such as this reflect a principle of game theory that has interested economists and political scientists.⁴⁰ Game theory stylizes an interaction into a small number of strategies each actor may choose. Each combination of strategies results in distinct, quantified pay-offs to each party.⁴¹ In stylized situations such as the famous "prisoner's dilemma" game, interaction in an extended, repeated context results in different equilibrium (i.e. "correct") strategies than does a one-time interaction.⁴² This means that in a game like the "Prisoner's Dilemma,"— which, if "played" just once, leads to a "defection" or "cheating" result that harms everyone — repetition of the game over an indefinite period leads to a result that one should actually *not* "defect." Essentially, this occurs in the "game" model because, over time, one can punish bad behavior by withholding one's own cooperation.⁴³

This is more widely recognized outside the stylized realm of game theory as an effect of reputation. When one interacts regularly with others, they get to know one's habits and character. As we have noted in diagram 5.4, one develops an honest character, and thereby an honest reputation, through practicing honesty as a consistent principle. An honest person can be taken for what he seems to be, which encourages others to be more forthcoming and benevolent towards him. A dishonest person reaps what he sows, and receives a cold shoulder and distrust from others. The kinds of people who wouldn't notice a deceptive character are those who are generally unobservant or erratic in their behavior. This is just the point of Premise 5: such people aren't the kind from whom one could gain much. Children, for instance, are the kind of people one can lie to and "get away with it," but what could children offer to reward such a strategy? For ethics, the important point is that whether or not situations occasionally emerge in which one can "cheat" and thereby gain in some short-run sense, they are at best rare and not easily identified in the course of normal, peaceful social intercourse. Given that such situations are quite rare, to be constantly on the alert for them twists one's character away from more common and fruitful sources of value. This is why a "principle of practical deception" is *impractical*.

The examples we have considered so far focus on material values, but the argument in diagram 5.9 applies to spiritual and social values as well. For example, many people conceive that one best upholds a valuable friendship or romantic relationship by the appropriate use of deception. However, the dis-

tinctive value one gains from these relationships is *visibility*, which is the perception of oneself through the response of others (as we noted in diagram 4.5). If the friend or loved one responds to one's pose or lies, rather than one's true self, then what one will receive from them is not visibility, but a reflected deception. This will tend to cause the relationship to seem unrewarding and artificial to the deceiver.⁴⁴ And of course such deceptions are especially difficult to sustain: the more intimate the relationship and the more personal the value one hopes to gain, the more difficult it is to sustain the lie that is meant to gain it.

So, Premises 4 and 5 lead to the intermediate conclusion stated in **Premise 6: deception is not an effective means of achieving values.** This naturally entails that we should avoid employing misrepresentation and deception. So Premise 6 leads to the conclusion of the diagram: **One needs a commitment to grasping the truth and acting in accordance with it.** Diagram 5.9 does not change our description of honesty, but it enriches our understanding of what it means to act in accordance with our grasp of the truth.

We can also apply this argument to analyzing the effects of self-deception. Although it is a common practice, self-deception presents a kind of philosophical puzzle: if you lie to yourself, who is deceiving whom? But if we reflect on how self-deception takes place, we see that it is not the case of person who firmly grasps the truth, casting lies out at himself. Rather, self-deception usually occurs when we fail to give sufficient attention to the truth in the first place.

Evasion and rationalization are the primary means by which one can deceive oneself. Evasion is the practice of ignoring facts, of blanking out and not thinking. Rationalization exploits the fact that errors in complex arguments are hard to detect: it is often relatively easy to provide specious reasons to support a cherished notion in the face of apparently contrary evidence. Whereas evasion ignores a fact: that one can't afford those new cloths, that one's lover is capricious and abusive, for example, rationalization ignores the difference between "possible" and "probable." A rationalizer construes what might plausibly seem to be the case, into what certainly is the case, exploiting the aspect of forming knowledge where bias is most possible. Both practices create within one's own mind the same spreading circle of misrepresentation that is created by lying to others, but in this case, the disruption is entirely internal.

Why would one seek to deceive oneself? Our needs to avoid pain and achieve self-esteem are both felt very directly and intimately, while other considerations, especially those distant in time and place, are easier to ignore. For this reason many people make the avoidance of pain or the defense of their self-conception a priority above all others. They prefer to interpret life in the most comforting terms, and hope for the best. This is the attitude of the unhappy child who escapes into a fantasy world, or of the spendthrift who always rationalizes his spending on the grounds of his current "needs."

Let's see how Diagram 5.9 applies to the case of self-deception. Pre-

mises 1, 2 and 3 summarize fundamental facts that lead to Premise 4. Premise 4 states that **deception is likely to work only to the extent that those deceived are unable or unwilling to integrate actively**. If one deceives oneself, this means that the bigger the deception, the more one will have to evade facts, or, similarly, accept plainly implausible rationalizations. One sees this among those mystics, for instance, who argue that they believe in heaven because they want to live in the hereafter, as if their belief determined the nature of reality. Notice that self-deception creates the same “tangled web” as the deception of others. As one seeks to defend one’s deception against reality, a small rationalization requires further rationalizations. Over time, convincing oneself of dubious argument will desensitize one to evasion, which is unfortunate, because evasion will be required, eventually, to fend off the unpleasant facts as they stare one in the face. So the mystic will pray for a cancer cure that will not come, and the spendthrift will have to blank-out the repossession of his computer and his car.

Premise 5 states that **to the extent that person does not integrate actively, he will not be able to offer value**. In the case of self-deception, this means that one will be less able to create value to the extent that one practices evasion and rationalization. These self-deceiving practices are doubly harmful in that they rebound on one’s other ideas, as we have seen. In a clash between an article of faith and one’s reasoned judgment, someone committed to faith will discard his judgment. This can lead to suicidal fanaticism, but it can also lead to more mundane psychological difficulties such as neurosis and anxiety. So the conclusion stated in Premise 6 still follows from the other premises: in the case of self-deception, **deception is not an effective means of achieving values**, for the similar reasons.

The argument in diagram 5.9 also applies to attempts to foster the welfare of others by deception. Say one attempts to raise a friend’s self-esteem and confidence by praising his dancing skills, though in fact he has poor sense of timing and often treads on his partner’s toes. This will succeed only to the extent that he ignores the facts of perception, such as cracking of his partners’ toes or his lack of dance partners. Worse, it can only be sustained if he fails to notice his own shortcomings, and thus can only discourage him from improving over time. In the end, he is likely to work out the truth in any case, and then his sense of worth will suffer from the realization that his friend holds him in too great a contempt to tell him the truth.

These are the reasons to incorporate the practice of honesty into one’s inner thought and outward communications. Of course, the need for honesty toward others does not make of virtue of offering improper or unsolicited criticisms to others: as we will see when we discuss the virtue of benevolence, civility does have value. One does better by telling one’s dancing friend that he is improving, and just needs to relax a little more, than by telling him he is a clodhopper. Honesty does not demand that one dwell on the negative at the expense

of the positive. But it does indicate that one is usually better off saying nothing to avoid offending than speaking falsely. And in general, as we've seen, a frank and truthful manner will encourage others to trust one's statements and deal with one in a more direct and open fashion, while allowing one to think objectively and act consistently.

Pride

Ayn Rand described pride as “moral ambitiousness,” because it is predicated on the aspiration to live up to one's ideals.⁴⁵ Pride is the principle of valuing one's self-esteem and taking the steps required to achieve it. We need such a principle because of our profound need for self-esteem, and because a robust self-esteem, grounded in the facts of reality, is not something we can achieve easily or automatically.

The antithesis of self-esteem is guilt: guilt for one's actions and guilt in oneself as their author. Historically, even as many ethical codes have condemned pride as a “deadly sin,” they have engendered guilt in their adherents by demanding compliance with moral ideals that are incompatible with life and happiness. To sustain a moral ideal that runs contrary to real human needs, these ethics make a virtue of humility, the moral antithesis of pride. Humility is the deprecation, on principle, of one's own actions, ability and character. In Christian ethics, for example, humility is the principle that encourages the faithful to despise reality and their own lives, and to sacrifice themselves to duty, others, and the Church.⁴⁶

Advocates of humility often characterize pride in terms of vanity and boasting. But objective pride is based in a rational recognition of facts in their proper context, and involves neither vanity nor boasting. Pride does not consist in unmerited admiration for oneself, or for some particular trait — such as physical beauty — out of its proper context. Nor does pride entail the false inflation of one's worth; *that* is merely self-deception, which, as we have just seen, is harmful to the self, not a source of self-esteem. In essence, when pride's critics treat it as vanity or boasting, they characterize a healthy trait in terms of an unhealthy distortion of it. This is rather like attacking those who choose to eat a healthy diet, because some people distort diet control into anorexia. It is a condemnation based on the nonessential similarity between the justified pride of a person taking credit for his accomplishments, and the hollow posturing of a braggart.

Self-esteem is the value pride aims at, but what justifies our regarding this as a value? Ayn Rand described *self-esteem* as “one's inviolate certainty that his mind is competent to think and his person is worthy of happiness, which means, worthy of life.”⁴⁸

Self-esteem is thus a positive self-assessment in terms of one's *compe-*

tency and one's worthiness.

Diagram 5.10 contains two lines of argument (labeled “A” and “B”) that lay out the means of achieving the two respective elements of self-esteem: line “A” addresses the need to regard oneself as competent to act; line “B” addresses the need to see oneself as worthy to do so.

Both elements of self-esteem derive from the cardinal value of Self, which is expressed in **Premise 1: one needs to value oneself**. Before we can pursue these goals as legitimate values, we need to show that they actually follow from premise 1.

Why does the cardinal value of self entail a need for self-esteem? We noted in Chapter 4 that self-esteem is *preceded* by a commitment to oneself as the ultimate beneficiary of one's actions, and that upholding this value means valuing oneself as a unique individual. Valuing oneself is a kind of basic positive assessment, but as a form of appreciation we can only sustain it over the long term by seeing it as true in fact. We need the objective conviction that we are worthy to hold the highest place among our values, and that we are justified in placing confidence in our own choices. Imagine attempting to continue to value yourself in the face of the repeated acceptance of incompetence, humiliation and guilt. As a psychological matter, no one can long maintain a disconnection between his most fundamental commitment to himself, and his evaluation of himself in practice.

Self-esteem is thus essential to the healthy functioning of the human organism. It is hard to imagine how one could regularly experience happiness in life without some measure of self-esteem. Happiness amounts to the savoring of one's values, in terms of one's own benefit from those values. How could one experience joy, if pervaded by a sense of unworthiness? How could one experience efficacy, if pervaded by a sense of incompetence?

Furthermore, as Nathaniel Branden has argued, a solid sense of self-esteem serves as the “immune system of consciousness.”⁴⁹ It makes one more able to withstand the vicissitudes of life, and gives one the confidence one needs in times of adversity or struggle. It also serves as deep reserve of strength that one can rely on when wrestling with psychological or emotional problems. As Branden puts it: “the value of self-esteem lies not merely in the fact that it makes us *feel* better but that it allows us to *live* better—to respond to challenges and opportunities more resourcefully and more appropriately.”⁵⁰

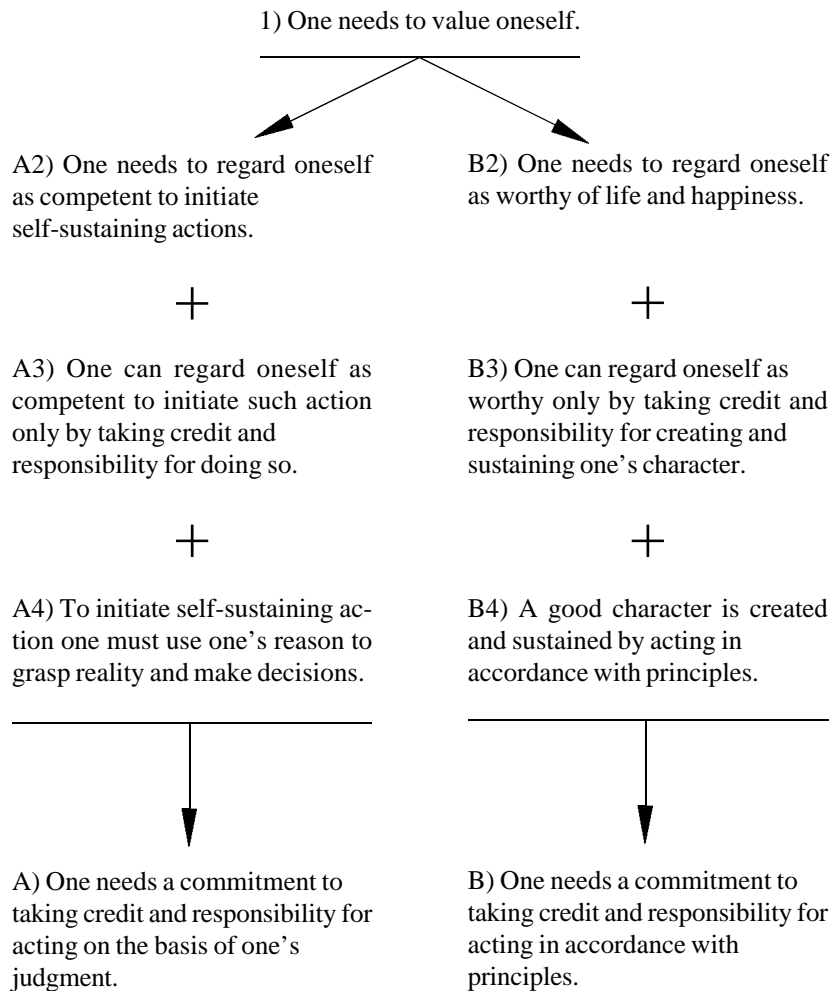
We can therefore infer directly from premise 1 that one needs both of the basic aspects of self-esteem. We will take each of these aspects in turn.

To trace the “A” line of argument—which centers on the competency aspect of self-esteem—we infer **Premise A2: one needs to regard oneself as competent to initiate self-sustaining actions**. Notice that this premise is not merely a deduction from premise 1, but is derived by considering the cardinal value of self in the light of the rich evidence on human nature that it integrates.

The virtue of pride aims at the two forms of positive self-assessment that constitute self-esteem. On the one hand, pride results in a positive assessment of one's actions. This corresponds to the competency aspect of self-esteem. On the other hand, pride results in esteem of oneself as their author. Pride

Diagram 5.10: Pride

Inductive Evidence: A3, B3: Psychology, introspection.



results in being able to look at one's accomplishments and say both "I did it" and "it is good." This is the perspective of a person of well-founded self-esteem.

Because pride is a commitment to achieving a positive assessment of oneself in the full context of one's life, it consists in two essential perspectives: looking backward and looking forward in time. These two perspectives provide one with the objective appreciation of one's past accomplishments on the one hand, and the commitment to success in the future on the other hand.

Pride in one's past means *taking credit* for one's specific achievements, pausing to recognize oneself with either "I did it," or "This is good" One should also take credit as a self-made being, for simply being who one is. This includes taking credit for one's accomplishments of character and personal development.

As an orientation toward the future, pride consists in *taking responsibility* for enhancing one's self-esteem, for building one's character, for being worthy of life. It means striving for moral and therefore existential improvement, with oneself as the beneficiary. For example, this means taking responsibility for one's material success and professional development by seeing to it that one pursues an enriching career or method of living that will help one become what one wants to be.

These two perspectives of pride are inseparable, because one cannot achieve self-esteem by means one without the other. By taking responsibility, one makes sure one will have objective reasons to assess oneself positively as time moves forward. But to make that positive assessment, one must take credit for one's actual accomplishments. One cannot experience self-esteem without taking credit, and one cannot earn it without taking responsibility.

With this point in hand, we ready to apply the two perspectives of pride to the argument in line "A."

Premise A3 summarizes the means by which we can achieve a sense of competency: **one can regard oneself as competent to initiate such action only by taking credit and responsibility for doing so.** Note that premise 3 is a fresh inductive point, one that depends on a wide range of introspective and psychological evidence. In recent years, a school of "self-esteem" psychology has grown up that equates self-esteem with nothing more than an inflated sense of self. But in fact, genuine self-esteem is based on objective achievements, as has been noted in empirical studies of the subject.⁵¹ This is only natural, since claims of competency, as we all know from our experience, are soon challenged by reality when one attempts to act on them. Claiming to be able to drive a truck, for example, will not keep one out of a wreck if one doesn't actually know how to drive. Similarly, claiming to be in control of one's life matters little if one's choices tend to result in the frustration of one's goals rather than their achievement.

What does initiating action essentially consist in, in the human case?

As we saw in Chapter 3, **to initiate self-sustaining action one must use one's reason to grasp reality and make decisions**. This is **Premise A4**. In other words, as we observed in discussing rationality, the choice to think is the root of all action, and rationality is theme of all virtue. The essence of rationality is acting on one's own objective judgment.

Together, premises A2, A3 and A4 lead us to the following conclusion, which is labeled **A** on the diagram: **One needs a commitment to taking credit and responsibility for acting on the basis of one's own judgment**. This commitment is the means to the "competency" aspect of self-esteem.

We derive means to the "worthiness" aspect of self-esteem by a parallel line of argument. To begin, we infer from Premise 1 that **one needs to regard oneself as worthy of life and happiness (Premise B2)**. Like premise A2, premise B2 is not a deduction from Premise 1, but follows from a consideration of the cardinal value of self in light of further psychological evidence. This evidence, which we surveyed above, indicates that a profound and ongoing esteem for ourselves as moral ends motivates us to confront adversity and seek the best in life. To regard oneself as worthy is to have reverence for oneself as a prime mover and self-created soul.

Premise B3 states the means of achieving this regard: **one can regard oneself as worthy only by taking credit and responsibility for creating and sustaining one's character**. This is the inductive recognition, based on introspective and psychological evidence, that one's character is the most psychologically profound moral feature one possesses. A deep sense of self-worth does not arise out of nothing, but from being engaged in the project of constructing oneself, and from assessing one's fundamental moral tendencies as healthy and noble. We saw in discussing diagrams 5.3 and 5.4 that creating one's moral character is the deepest way one can shape oneself, because it means internalizing and automating one's principles as subconscious habits that color everything one does. So in creating our characters, we *take responsibility* for achieving moral worthiness in the future. To experience the esteem that follows from it, we have to *take credit* for the moral worth that our characters have actually evinced.

Premise B4 reminds us of the method of doing this, which we noted in premise 5 of diagram 5.4: **a good character is created and sustained by acting in accordance with principles**. Together, Premises B2, B3 and B4 point to **conclusion B: One needs a commitment to taking credit and responsibility for acting in accordance with principles**. This commitment is the aspect of pride that has the achievement of a sense of self-worth as its aim.

Combining conclusions A and B, we can see that the virtue of *pride* is *a commitment to achieve self-esteem by taking credit and responsibility for acting on one's judgment, in accordance with principles*. In effect, then, pride requires the self-conscious practice of the virtues of *rationality* (for judgment),

integrity (character), and *productiveness* (for responsibility). As a commitment to an objectively positive self-regard, as opposed to self-deception, pride also requires the practice of *honesty*. Indeed, because pride directs one to be both existentially efficacious and of good moral character, every virtue that we identify as a practical means to our long-term well-being (and thus as part of a good character, too) becomes a means which pride incorporates into the pursuit of self-esteem. Thus our need for the virtue of pride reinforces the rationale for everything we have said about rationality, integrity, productiveness, and honesty. These principles are founded on the existential requirements of living well. But once that rationale is established, it is reinforced by the spiritual need to value oneself as the life one is always in the process of creating. In this way, there are “feedback loops” among the virtues just as there are among the values.

It is important to note, however, that arguments for other virtues that derive from pride are logically dependent on the arguments we have studied in each case. One cannot say, for instance, that one’s self-esteem depends on being a person of integrity, independent of one’s need to think in principles and develop one’s moral character. Rather, given that one does have a need for a commitment to acting on principle to achieve long-term values, one can take pride in acting on principle. There is thus a general kind of “feedback” argument, which proceeds as follows: “X enhances one’s ability to live and be happy: therefore, X is a virtue. My self-esteem depends on regarding myself as competent (A3) and worthy (B3). Only by making commitments to act in ways that genuinely enhance my ability to live and be happy can I objectively regard myself as competent and worthy. Therefore, my self-esteem depends on X.” This pattern applies to the social virtues we have yet to establish, just as much as it applies the virtues we have already examined.

One has similar reasons of pride for each of the values one pursues and each of the virtues one practices. In analyzing one’s reasons, and in presenting them to others, it is crucial for the sake of clarity to recognize cases of logical dependence like this. We cannot say that *in addition* to the more fundamental arguments for the virtues, we have also this argument from pride. Rather, *given* the more fundamental arguments, we therefore have reasons of pride as well.

Aristotle described pride the *crown* of the virtues, because it calls upon each of them. This is an accurate description, and when we take credit for our accomplishments, we experience the profound psychological reward of each of our virtues. But this characterization puts all the emphasis on the retrospective view, on pride in the past. As the practice of aspiring to moral improvement in the future, pride might also be described as our *moral compass*. Pride is a compass that points to self-esteem as its goal, and that directs us to moral ambitiousness as the means of reaching it.⁵²

In moments of moral deliberation, people often bypass other considerations by relying on their pride, which means, relying on their character and

sense of self. But is this justified? Since one's reasons of pride are logically derivative, we might think it inappropriate to reach a moral decision by saying, in effect, "I'm not the kind of person who would do that," or "I need to be able to look myself in the mirror." Indeed, some critics of Objectivism criticize its practical, teleological ethic by claiming that it rules out such elevated forms of moral reasoning.

We have noted that we can distinguish between the logical fundamentality of a value, and its importance in a hierarchy of personal values. Values such as a career or romantic love are important, without being fundamental, because they provide so many more fundamental values. Similarly, we can distinguish between, on the one hand, the logical priority of various arguments in establishing virtues, and the application of our conclusions in daily moral decision making. An objective pride in one's character sums up one's moral accomplishments, which means that it sums up one's commitments to the other virtues. This is why one's pride is a moral compass that guides one in creating a happy, successful life. In one's pride, one takes stock of one's overall moral condition. When one does not have the time or a good reason to engage in more complex moral deliberation, it is therefore not only convenient, but necessary, to rely on one's sense of self as one's guide. One has to face many concrete problems that one cannot reason through in every detail, and it is entirely appropriate to handle them by asking oneself "Could I take pride in doing this?" This is just what a moral compass is for.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have surveyed the major virtues of Objectivism that apply to the individual as such, without regard for his engagement with society at large. We have noted the primacy of rationality among the virtues, and its intimate connection to honesty. We have seen that our need to act on principle and develop a good moral character, to which integrity is the means, is crucial to our grasp of the practicality of the virtues as policies of action. We have discussed the remaining two cardinal virtues of productiveness and pride, including the relative priority of productive work among our values, and the feedback relationship between all of the virtues and pride.

In chapter 6 we will apply similar methods to the exploration of the virtues of Objectivism that apply primarily in a social context.

-
- 1 Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* 1012.
- 2 *Ibid.* 1018–1019.
- 3 See e.g. Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* Book V 1129a 9–26.
- 4 For Rand on virtues as commitments, see “The Objectivist Ethics” 28. Our characterization of virtues as policies of acting is distinctive from, but consonant with, Rand’s various usages. Of course, a virtue may also be viewed negatively as a policy of *not acting* in ways that are incompatible with its policy of action. Honesty, for instance, is also a policy of not lying, and trade is also a policy of not defrauding.
- 5 This is more generally what Aristotle seems to mean by “disposition.” See Aristotle *Metaphysics* Book V 1022b 19 and 20. For a discussion of Aristotle’s conception, see for instance D.S. Hutchinson *The Virtues of Aristotle* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986) 8–11, 35–38. Rand’s substantial difference from Aristotle does not lie in the somewhat trivial point that virtues are traits of a human being, but rather in her decomposition of virtues into the three aspects of conscious recognition, goal-directed action, and freely chosen commitment.
- 6 Rand, “The Objectivist Ethics” 27–28.
- 7 It might be objected that to say that both the choice to live and the choice to think are fundamental in a certain respect is a subjectivist equivocation on the meaning of the term “fundamental.” There is nothing subjective in recognizing the relativity of fundamentality. To say that something is fundamental is to say that it explains certain features or actions better than any other thing does; it is to say that it is the cause of those effects. Thus fundamentality, while objective, depends upon what it is that one seeks to explain. In this sense fundamentality has a relative character, although not a subjective one (much as velocity has a relative character in physics). If one is seeking to characterize the ultimate ends of human action (values), the conditional nature of life is the fundamental source of them. If one is seeking to characterize the manner in which humans should act to acquire values, then what is fundamental is the basic mode and source of human action, namely reason. Thus what is in fact fundamental, depends what it is that one seeks to explain.
- 8 It is an open technical question whether an exhaustive categorization of “major” virtues is even possible. On the one hand, it may be that since human nature has delimited characteristics, it is possible at some level of abstraction to exhaustively categorize the types of actions appropriate to man. It may be, for instance, that the virtue of rationality *is* that exhaustive categorization, but in a sense so abstract as to be trivial. Or, one might say that as the cardinal values universally characterize human action for values, so their correspond-

ing virtues of rationality, productiveness and pride universally characterize virtuous human action. But again, there are objections: the other major virtues we discuss in this book, such as independence and integrity, are not reducible to applications of the cardinal virtues, except insofar as they all involve the application of reason to the problem of guiding human action. One must also bear in mind that virtues are contextual, and the increase in knowledge and technology is always creating new situations. In any case, what matters in establishing virtues is that they provide significant guidance in an important aspect of life.

9 Rand, *The Fountainhead*, (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1943) New York: Signet, 195-198

10 This unprincipled approach is characteristic of many forms of consequentialism, utilitarianism, and pragmatism.

11 Rand, *The Fountainhead*, 196

12 *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology, expanded 2nd Edition*, 62.

13 This point can be observed in human development: while the mind is *tabularasa* as regards conceptual knowledge, as organisms infants are innately oriented toward their basic survival needs. They breathe and suck reflexively, and respond to sensations of pleasure and pain. This automatic awareness of benefit and harm allows the infant to attend to its parents and learn from them, to focus on meaningful facts out of the welter of details with which reality confronts it.

14 Cite on role of character in directing focus/attention? Some psychological source

15 A common debate among people discussing Objectivism revolves around John Galt's decision, in *Atlas Shrugged*, to give himself up to save Dagny Taggart from the thuggish regime's threats. Isn't this altruism? At the least, doesn't this show that Galt's own survival cannot be his ultimate value? One can view this as an instance of character at work in an unforeseen way. One gains great values of visibility, communication, emotional motivation, pleasure, and from a love to which one commits oneself whole-heartedly. Yet that very commitment may cause one to develop a character that esteems the loved one above all other things. Normally, since human interests are in harmony (as we will confirm in Chapter 6), this does not imply any sacrifice to the loved one. But in a perverse, irrational, man-made situation such as Galt's choice in the novel, one may find oneself unexpectedly committed to endangering oneself for the sake of what one loves.

Regardless of how we view Galt's fictional choice (which is fraught with symbolism and melodrama in any case, and not intended as an ethical primer), this sort of event occurs with some regularity in real life. Political leaders of the 1930s and 1940s, and indeed even everyday people in Europe, are sometimes criticized for having been too slow to react to the genocidal intentions

of the Nazi Regime. Yet it would have been out-of-character, especially for peace-loving middle-class Jews in Europe, to deal with others by means other than trade. Furthermore, the genocide actually perpetrated was so far beyond historical experience and rational expectation, that no one would have been justified in advance in developing the character of a guerrilla fighter that would have been required to combat the threat. But, thus the pathetic fact that the Nazis were able to slaughter millions with relatively little resistance.

- 16 David Kelley “The Best Within US” *IOS Journal* 3,1 and 3,2 discusses a commitment to productive work as emblematic of an orientation toward achievement.
- 17 This approach to productiveness is different from the approach offered by Peikoff in *Objectivism*, for reasons addressed in Diagram 5.6. Although it reflects themes that have circulated in Objectivist publications, as an integrated presentation this section therefore represents a higher degree of innovation than is normal in this book.
- 18 “The Objectivist Ethics” 25.
- 19 Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* 1020
- 20 The “life-cycle” pattern of earnings, savings, and expenditure has been widely studied by economists.
- 21 There is a popular myth that there is a persistent class of people whose inherited wealth allows them to live over the long term without productively managing their wealth or exerting themselves. Although inheritors who fail to manage their wealth are quite common, the effect of their actions is not to perpetuate their wealth but to extinguish it. This is why economists observe that there is little correlation of wealth within families over three generations: one generation produces wealth, the next spends what inheritance it gets, and the third is left starting back where the first began. (*cite?)
- 22 In pre-industrial societies, no more than 15% of the population ever lived by dependency or coercion. Even in the most generous welfare state, this number rarely exceeds 25%. In the context of the welfare state, virtually everyone receives some unearned subsidies or benefits, such as public education. But the number that rely on entitlements and charity, rather than earning their primary source of livelihood, is much smaller. (sources?)
- 23 Rand, “The Objectivist Ethics.” 25. Rand also discusses this idea in her *Playboy* magazine interview.
- 24 Peikoff, *Objectivism: the Philosophy of Ayn Rand* 299. For his full treatment of productiveness and purpose, see 297-302
- 25 Because it outlines an inaccurate line of argument, diagram 5.6 does not appear in the fold-out “Big Diagram.”
- 26 The need for an orderly hierarchy of values has been examined in mathematical terms in the preference theory at the root of neo-classical economics.
- 27 Peikoff, *Objectivism: the Philosophy of Ayn Rand* 299

- 28 Production, however vital, is not a value we can or should pursue at all times. There is a proper time to lay off work and rest, or engage in recreation. Of course, we might view our rest or recreation as means to improving our effectiveness in production, but that would only make sense if they were values for no other reason but that. We have not analyzed rest and recreation in any detail in this book, yet it is plain that directly increasing one's effectiveness in production is only one way in which they provide material values. Rest allows the body to heal, for instance, and recreation provides one with exercise, which makes one more healthy and robust. Furthermore, recreation is an arena devoted primarily to the experience of happiness, i.e. to fun, to the psychological experience of "this is worth living for." Thus, although rest and recreation can be direct or indirect means of achieving material values, it would be reductionist to regard them as instances of or means to production. After all, if all value-achieving action qualifies as production, then we would have to consider even the several forms of taking as attenuated forms of production.
- 29 "Playboy's Interview with Ayn Rand," 7.
- 30 In traditional, pre-industrial societies (and indeed, even today in much of the world), parents raise children for the work value children can provide and as source of material support in their old age. In capitalist society, pensions and insurance have taken over these functions.
- 31 See e.g. David Kelley "Responsibility and Happiness" *IOS Journal* 5,3 1-4,7. See also his "The Best Within Us" *IOS Journal* 3,1 and 3,2 for a presentation of the general approach to productiveness that characterizes this section.
- 32 It is true that a thing one values may be of deep primary importance to someone else. For instance, two music lovers may regard the *Brandenburg Concerti* with an equal intensity of esteem.; two hungry people may both regard a hamburger with yearning. But their primary esteem is not for each other's values *as such*, but for the particular item in question. That is, it does not matter in either of these cases that another person shares one's esteem for a thing. The music lover may enjoy Bach, and the hungry person may enjoy his burger, with equal zest regardless of whether another person tastes those delights as well.
- 33 Peikoff, *Objectivism: the Philosophy of Ayn Rand* 268
- 34 Those familiar with Leonard Peikoff's writings on truth and objectivity will notice the difference between our treatment and his. Peikoff holds essentially that truth can only obtain if reached by a rational process, and thus that arbitrary (i.e. unproven) ideas are also meaningless. He holds that the arbitrary is therefore "neither true nor false." (See his *Objectivism* 163–171) Our position on the arbitrary is more subtle and traditional in character. A statement or idea may lack meaning, because it is ungrammatical or contains words that are not symbols of concepts. Thus, "The Zeebles of Zroom are Zumptions," is

an obvious instance of a phrase that is neither true nor false because (we assure you) its words identify nothing in reality, not even fictional figures in a fictional context. Yet one could make meaningful statements without having any evidence for them, such as “There is a Greek Orthodontist in Tegucigalpa, Honduras.” If one knew nothing of orthodontists in Honduras, this proposition would certainly be arbitrary. Yet it is meaningful, and refers to a state of affairs that either does or does not exist. So some arbitrary claims are either true or false.

- 35 Nathaniel Branden makes a similar point in discussing “living consciously” in *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem* 68-72.
- 36 Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* 1019
- 37 Thanks to Eyal Mozes for suggesting this distinction.
- 38 Sir Walter Scott *Marmion* Canto VI, Stanza 17, lines 28, 29
- 39 Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*.
- 40 Generalizations from game theory have also attracted attention in philosophical circles recently. Robert Axelrod’s *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984) is a widely cited work in this area. Few philosophers appreciate the fact that Axelrod’s studies were based on the operations of simple automata (that is, computer programs) that are poor substitutes for reasoning minds. Formal game theory is a better substitute, but is still quite stylized.
- 41 Because it involves highly stylized models, game theory’s direct applicability to real world situations is usually rather limited. As with any stylized model, one must evaluate a game theory result with an eye for essential issues ignored in the abstraction, as well as those it captures well. For example, most non-cooperative game theory results, such as the famous one-shot “prisoner’s dilemma,” assume a context in which it is impossible for the actors to make binding contracts. A contract could add additional strategies and/or change the payoffs that result from existing strategies. For instance, in the “prisoner’s dilemma,” one assumes that the actors cannot agree to an additional fine for defection, one large enough to assure cooperation. On this ground alone, one should be cautious about characterizing real life situations, especially one of importance, with such a model.
- 42 In non-cooperative game theory, “Nash equilibrium” strategies are, precisely, the strategies for each player that are optimal given what the others choose.
- 43 For a discussion that combines mathematical rigor with attention to philosophical points, see e.g. Ken Binmore, *Fun and Games*. (Lexington: D.C. Heath, 1992) 355-357
- 44 Eyal Mozes made this point in correspondence.
- 45 “The Objectivist Ethics,” 27
- 46 Cite e.g. Catholic Confession of Faith (?) on Humility as a virtue.
- 47 C.S. Lewis “Mere Christianity” (Where: who, when) what page?

48 Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 1018

49 Branden, *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem* 3-25.

50 *ibid.* 5

51 Bednar and Peterson

52 As evidence of pride as the crown of our virtues, or as a moral compass for the future, we might note that in elucidating practical therapeutic principles for enhancing one's self-esteem, Nathaniel Branden effectively directs his readers to live moral lives. "The Six Pillars of Self Esteem" that Branden advocates include "living consciously" (rationality/honesty?), "self-responsibility" and "living purposefully" (productiveness?), "personal integrity," (integrity) and "self-assertiveness" (independence?).