

## LIBERTY AND NATURE: THE MISSING LINK

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I think that values enter the world with life; and if there is life without consciousness . . . then I suggest that there will also be objective values, even without consciousness. – Karl Popper (1982, 194)

One index of the boldness and originality of Ayn Rand's philosophy is her attempt to combine two bodies of thought that are generally regarded as diametrically opposed: Aristotelian moral philosophy and Lockean, rights-based classical liberalism. Although Aristotle would likely have regarded classical liberalism with horror, Rand argued that the only tenable foundation for classical liberalism is a broadly Aristotelian moral philosophy. Rand's arguments have been taken up and elaborated in a number of books: Tibor R. Machan's *Individuals and their Rights* (1989), *Human Rights and Human Liberties: A Radical Reconsideration of the American Political Tradition* (1975), and *Capitalism and Individualism: Reframing the Argument for the Free Society* (1990); Douglas B. Rasmussen and Douglas J. Den Uyl's *Liberty and Nature: An Aristotelian Defense of Liberal Order* (1991) and *Liberalism Defended: The Challenge of Post-Modernity* (1997)<sup>1</sup>; and Tara Smith's *Moral Rights and Political Freedom* (1995). Although it would be a mistake to reduce all aspects of these works to Rand's position, the central link of all these arguments—the link they seek to forge between Lockean liberty and Aristotelian nature—is derived directly from Rand. I shall argue that this link between liberty and nature is the weakest link of their argument, and if it fails, then so does the entire chain of reasoning.

### 1. Life as the Standard of Value

In "The Objectivist Ethics," Rand (1964) argues that life is the standard of value. She begins by reflecting upon the phenomenon of values. Values, she observes, are those things that living beings act to

gain and/or keep. Values are defined teleologically, as the ends of action. Rand then asks the transcendental question: "What makes values possible?" Rand's answer is: life. Life makes values possible because the continued existence of every living thing is, in large part, contingent upon that thing's actions. At all times, living things face the alternative possibilities of continued life or death. They also face the alternative possibilities of sickness and health, impaired functioning or flourishing.<sup>2</sup> Because living things face these alternatives, certain activities, objects, and states of affairs show up as good or bad in terms of their impact upon life and flourishing. Values are those conditions of life and flourishing that living beings can act to gain and/or keep. Disvalues are those things detrimental to continued life and flourishing, those things that living beings consequently act to avoid or ameliorate.

Non-living things do not have values. The continued existence of a rock is, of course, contingent. It could be eroded by rain or pulverized into gravel. But it would make no sense to say that its continued existence as a rock is *good* for the rock, or that its destruction is *bad*. Nor would it make sense to claim that its continued existence as a rock is an *achievement* of the rock, or that its destruction as a rock is its *failure*. The rock's continued existence is not an object of its concern or its actions. Thus, the rock has no values. The same is true of an immortal and fully actualized being, such as Aristotle's Unmoved Mover. Such a being, because it does not face the possibility of death or unactualized existence, faces no genuine alternative between good and bad. Therefore, it need not act to achieve the good or avoid the bad.<sup>3</sup>

A "standard" of value is that in terms of which good and bad, value and disvalue, are discriminated. For each kind of living being, the standard by which good and bad are discriminated is: flourishing, health, the maintenance and actualization of the life appropriate to each kind of living thing. In Rand's words, "An organism's life is its *standard of value*: that which furthers its life is the *good*, that which threatens it is the *evil*" (17). If the standard of value is flourishing, then the good for each kind of living thing consists of all of the conditions necessary for its flourishing. And the bad consists of all those things that destroy life and impede flourishing.

And what of human beings? For human beings, the question of the *standard* of value takes on added significance. Plants and animals do not consciously *evaluate* what is good or bad for them. Instead, Rand claims, they have innate "knowledge" of what is good and bad.<sup>4</sup> Human beings, however, have no such innate knowledge. We must consciously

discover what is good and bad, and we must discern them in light of a standard. Rand claims that this standard is "*man's life*, or: that which is required for man's survival *qua man*" (23). Rand then explains that, "'Man's survival *qua man*' means the terms, methods, conditions and goals required for the survival of a rational being through the whole of his lifespan—in all those aspects of existence which are open to his choice" (24).

From the claim that "*man's life*" is the standard of value, Rand moves directly to the argument that, "Since reason is man's basic means of survival, that which is proper to the life of a rational being is the good; that which negates, opposes or destroys it is the evil" (23). All virtues and values must, therefore, be concretizations or applications of rationality to the problem of survival. Rand names but three supreme values: reason, purpose, and self-esteem. She also names just seven virtues (selfishness not among them): rationality, productiveness, and pride (these three being merely verbalized restatements of her three main values), as well as honesty, integrity, independence, and justice. Stated as an imperative, Rand's ethic is: Pursue reason, purpose, and self-esteem—and do so in a way that is rational, productive, morally ambitious, honest, integrated, independent, and just.

## 2. Intrinsic, Subjective, and Objective Value

In her essay, "What is Capitalism?" Rand (1966) proposes a threefold distinction between intrinsic, subjective, and objective value. In ethics, as in all other branches of philosophy, Rand feels the threat of nihilism and subjectivism and is, therefore, quite concerned to establish the objectivity of her claims. Rand is also, however, acutely aware that some of the best friends of skepticism and nihilism are overly stringent, "Platonic" accounts of objectivity. For instance, in both philosophy and common sense there is a long-standing identification of objectivity with *immediacy*. On this account, in order to attain objectivity, one must abstract away all *mediating factors*. Such factors, it is claimed, constitute a veil that prevents things from showing up as they really are, allowing them to show up "merely" as they appear to us. To know the thing as it really is, one must, therefore, abstract away all personal interests, projects, and presuppositions. One must, moreover, abstract away all theoretical constructs, interpretive frameworks, and the relativity introduced by the human sense organs. Objectivity, in short, requires a "God's eye" view of the world. Rand describes this position both as mysticism and rationalism,

but her technical term is "intrinsicism."<sup>5</sup>

If one accepts an intrinsicist criterion of objectivity, then one must immediately conclude that objectivity is impossible for human beings. Only God can have a God's eye view of things. The irony of intrinsicism is that, in attempting to ensure objectivity, it sets unattainable, superhuman standards—thus leading directly to skepticism or (as Rand usually prefers) "subjectivism." In Rand's words, "skepticism and mysticism are ultimately interchangeable, and the dominance of one always leads to the resurgence of the other" (Rand 1990, 79). Intrinsicism and subjectivism are like the two ends of a see-saw. From the point of view of each end of the see-saw, their positions are irreconcilably opposed, and the fortune of each rises as the other's falls. From the point of view of someone not on the see-saw, the positions are not irreconcilably opposed, but deeply unified. Both ends are united in the middle and rest upon a common fulcrum: an unrealistic criterion of objectivity.

Rand rejects this criterion of objectivity. She tries to escape the oscillation between intrinsicism and subjectivism by knocking the common fulcrum from under them. She defines her own position, "Objectivism," in contradistinction to both intrinsicism and subjectivism.

In epistemology, Objectivism entails the rejection of the idea that finitude and mediation are incompatible with knowing. Rand holds that all knowers are finite and all knowing is mediated. But it is still *knowing*—not illusion, not construction (79-81).

In ethics, Rand discerns a similar oscillation between intrinsicism and subjectivism. The intrinsicist holds that if there are to be objective values, then they must be defined independent of particular human interests or practical considerations:

The *intrinsic* theory holds that the good is inherent in certain things or actions as such, regardless of their context and consequences, regardless of any benefit or injury they may cause to the actors and subjects involved. It is a theory that divorces the concept of "good" from beneficiaries, and the concept of "value" from valuer and purpose—claiming that the good is good in, by, and of itself. (Rand 1966, 21)

To this understanding of values, the subjectivist objects that values which bear no connection to human interests and actions are useless. He asks "Why be moral?" Since, however, he shares the intrinsicist criterion—to

wit: if there are objective values, then they must be defined independent of particular human interests or practical considerations—he concludes that all values that are related to human life must be subjective.

The subjectivist theory holds that the good bears no relationship to the facts of reality, that it is the product of a man's consciousness, created by feelings, desires, "intuitions," or whims, and that it is merely an "arbitrary postulate" or an "emotional commitment." (21-22)

Intrinsicism and subjectivism are both *non-relational* theories of the good. Intrinsicism holds that the good inheres in certain actions, intentions, or states of mind, regardless of their relationship to human well-being. Furthermore, the goodness inherent in an act, intention, or state of mind can be determined without reference to any other factors. An intrinsicist who holds that the good inheres in intentions would, for instance, evaluate as morally equal both failed and successful attempts to help others, provided that they followed from the same good intentions. Subjectivism, too, holds that the good is non-relational. It is whatever is posited as good by a subject—individual, collective, or divine—regardless of its relationship to human well-being. A subjectivist would, for instance, claim that taking mind-altering and addictive drugs is good for someone if he truly desires it—regardless of its effects on his well-being. Rand states nicely the non-relationalism common to both intrinsicism and subjectivism: "The intrinsic theory holds that the good resides in some sort of reality, independent of man's consciousness; the subjectivist theory holds that the good resides in man's consciousness, independent of reality."

The objective theory of the good, by contrast, holds that the good is essentially relational:

The *objective* theory holds that the good is neither an attribute of "things in themselves" nor of man's emotional states, but *an evaluation* of the facts of reality by man's consciousness according to a rational standard of value. . . . The objective theory holds that *the good is an aspect of reality in relation to man*—and that it must be discovered, not invented, by man. (22)

For Rand, an objective value is a multi-termed relationship. But what kind

of relationship? How complex a relationship?

The key to my critique lies in the interpretation of the *kind* of relationship definitive of an objective value. Consider Rand's argument for life as the standard of value. Rand argues that values and disvalues are grounded in the contingent nature of life. Values are those things that maintain and enhance a particular organism's life. Disvalues are those things that degrade or destroy a particular organism's life. Now, this is true of all kinds of organisms, from one-celled organisms to plants to highly developed animals. No matter what its mode of survival, for a living thing the conditions of existence and flourishing are objective values. Given the natures of living things and the natures of the things in their environments, relationships of value arise *by virtue of those facts alone*. For instance, given the natures of a fly and a toad, if the two are placed in proximity to one another, value relationships arise automatically: the toad is a danger to the fly; the fly is a meal for the toad. For plants and animals, then, value is a *two-termed* relationship between objective states of affairs and the continued existence and flourishing of a living being.

When Rand comes to man, however, she shifts her definition of objective value in a subtle but absolutely crucial manner. As with plants and lower animals, objective values and disvalues are defined in terms of a relationship of a fact of reality to the contingent existence of life and flourishing. In Rand's words, "The objective theory holds that *the good is an aspect of reality in relation to man*" (22). For man, however, there is a crucial difference. Whereas for plants and lower animals, value relationships are "direct" and unmediated by consciousness, for man, value relationships are *mediated by the judgments of the mind*. For man, an objective value is not a fact of reality in relationship to his life *tout court*, but a fact of reality in relationship to his life *as grasped by his mind*. This is the clear implication of the passage quoted above. The good is held to be "*an evaluation of the facts of reality by man's consciousness according to a rational standard of value.*" The "rational standard of value" is, of course, "man's life *qua* man," which is brought into relation with the facts of reality by an act of judgment, an evaluation. For man, then, the good is a *three-termed* relationship between (1) an entity, action, or state of affairs, which is (2) evaluated by a subject in light of (3) the standard of man's life.

But what is the relationship of these three terms? As we shall see, Rand's argument for liberalism depends upon her claim that all three terms are *necessary conditions* for the existence of human values. For Rand, X is an objective human value if and only if it is (1) a fact of reality in relation to (2) the requirements of human life as (3) grasped by a human

knower. The heart of my critique of Rand is that the third condition is not necessary for the existence of objective human values. I shall argue that something can be a value to a particular person, *regardless of whether he has evaluated it as such*.

### 3. Objective Value, Autonomy, and Liberalism

Rand defines capitalism as, "a social system based on the recognition of individual rights, including property rights, in which all property is privately owned" (19, emphasis deleted). Rand holds that the defense of individual rights, including property rights, is desirable in order to create a social system in which persons relate to one another by rational persuasion and voluntary trade rather than by force and fraud: "In capitalist society, all human relationships are *voluntary*. Men are free to cooperate or not, to deal with one another or not, as their own individual judgments, convictions, and interests dictate. They can deal with one another only . . . by means of reason, i.e., by means of discussion, persuasion, and contractual agreement, by voluntary choice to mutual benefit" (19). Reason and trade are to be preferred over force and fraud because reason is man's means of survival: "The action required to sustain human life is primarily intellectual: everything that man needs has to be discovered by his mind and produced by his effort. Production is the application of reason to the problem of survival" (17). Rand holds, however, that the exercise of reason is volitional. Reason is a conceptual and inferential mode of cognition. Sensory awareness is automatic. One just opens one's eyes and there the world is. Concept-formation and inference, however, are not automatic. They must be initiated and sustained by choice. Free choice, therefore, is the basis of rational cognition, and since life as a rational animal is the good life for man, freedom is a necessary condition for the possibility of the good life. Force and fraud negate free choice, thereby undercutting the exercise of rationality, thereby undercutting the good life at its root. They are, therefore, necessarily disvalues. The basic social condition for the good life is the protection of rational activity from force and fraud. "Rights" delimit the spaces and boundaries of human social interactions. Individuals have the right to act upon their own judgment, free from force and fraud. They have the right to enter into any social relationship that does not involve force or fraud. The function of a legitimate government is limited to the protection of individual rights against force and fraud. The government ensures "negative" liberty to its citizens, i.e., it protects the

freedom of the will as such. It protects not only our freedom to do right, but also our freedom to do wrong—consistent with the equal freedom of others. The social order that arises when individual rights are protected and force and fraud are outlawed is *capitalism*.

Rand's three-term account of objective human values plays a crucial role in this argument: "The objective theory of values is the only moral theory incompatible with rule by force. Capitalism is the only system based implicitly on an objective theory of values . . ." (23). It is the objective nature of values that makes it impossible to achieve the good by means other than rational persuasion and voluntary agreement:

If one knows that the good is *objective*—i.e., determined by the nature of reality, but to be discovered by man's mind—one knows that an attempt to achieve the good by physical force is a monstrous contradiction which negates morality at its root by destroying man's capacity to recognize the good, i.e., his capacity to value. Force invalidates and paralyzes a man's judgment, demanding that he act against it, thus rendering him morally impotent. A value that one is forced to accept at the price of surrendering one's mind, is not a value to anyone; the forcibly mindless can neither judge nor choose nor value. An attempt to achieve the good by force is like an attempt to provide a man with a picture gallery at the price of cutting out his eyes. Values cannot exist (cannot be valued) outside the full context of man's life, needs, goals, and *knowledge*. (23)

Here Rand makes it clear that the free exercise of judgment is a *necessary* condition for the existence of an objective human value. If one prevents the free exercise of judgment through force or trickery, then any "values" obtained by this process are not really values at all—even though they would have been values had they been obtained without force or fraud.<sup>6</sup> Rasmussen and Den Uyl (1991) make this same point, albeit in slightly different language:

A world in which people are self-directed but fail to do the morally proper thing is better than a world in which human beings are prevented from being self-directed but whose actions conform to what would be right if they

had chosen those actions themselves. In other words, if I am not the author of the activity, that activity is not good or right for me even if it should nonetheless be true that if I were the author of that activity it would be good or right for me. . . . Self-directedness is both a necessary condition for and an operating condition of the pursuit and achievement of human flourishing. It is necessary for any person undertaking *any* right action. And without it, human flourishing would not be human flourishing. (95-96)

Now, it is important to recognize the scope of this argument. Although Rand believes that she has constructed an argument against any attempt to acquire values through force and fraud, all she has succeeded in doing is constructing an argument against paternalism. Rand's argument works only against the attempt by A to force or trick B into accepting something valuable *for B*. For instance, if Rand is right, then it is not a value for a drug addict to kick his habit *if he is forced to do so*. It would, however, be a value if he kicked the habit on his own. Rand, apparently, would claim that the absence of self-directedness from forced sobriety would be so damaging as to render it a non-value. Or consider another case. Sometimes, doctors must face the question of whether or not to tell seriously ill patients the truth about the nature or gravity of their conditions. Some patients react so badly when informed that their recovery is impaired. According to Rand, however, a recovery that is aided by trickery is not a value at all—although it would be a value if no trickery had been employed. It is hard to see, though, how these examples of force and fraud are as self-defeating as admitting someone to a picture gallery at the price of cutting out his eyes.

It should be noted, furthermore, that given her account of objective human values Rand's is a *weak* argument against paternalism, for even acts of paternalism meet her three criteria for objective human values. Take, for instance, the case of an addict forced into a treatment program. Freedom from drug addiction is an objective human value insofar as it is the absence of a fact of reality that impacts negatively on human survival and flourishing as judged by a human knower (in this case the paternalist). Rand is fond of claiming that just as nobody can digest another man's food, nobody can think for another man. But the analogy is weak. Human reason does, in principle, allow us to see what is right for others even if

they themselves cannot see it. And it does, in principle, allow us to make decisions for others. The question, though, is whether we *should*. Rand, of course, thinks that we shouldn't try, so she argues that we can't succeed. In keeping with her intention, then, we should reformulate her account of objective human values so that we simply *can't* judge what is valuable for others. Suitably revised, her account would have to read: An objective human value is a fact of reality in relation to the requirements of the survival and flourishing of a particular human being *as judged by that same human being*.

Whether in its strong or weak versions, however, Rand's argument against paternalism does not establish that A cannot use force or fraud on B to achieve a value *for A*. For instance, if Jean Valjean were to steal a loaf of bread, the bread would not somehow magically lose its nutritional properties by virtue of the fact that it was stolen. It would still be an objective value insofar as it involves a fact of reality (the nutritional value of the loaf) in relation to the requirements for the survival and flourishing of a particular human being (the need for sustenance) as grasped by that same human being (Jean Valjean).

Rand, however, does argue that the bread is not a value by denying that the third criterion is really met, for although the thief does, in fact, judge the bread to be a value, the commission of a dishonest act undercuts the long-run efficacy of his rational faculty, thus undercutting his capacity to have any values at all. Now, before we examine Rand's rationale for this claim, we should note that, simply as stated, it is not a satisfactory answer, for to claim that one's theft on Monday undercuts one's judgment on Tuesday is not the same as saying that it undercuts one's judgment on *Monday*, but that is what Rand needs to establish if she is to claim that criterion three has not been met. At best, Rand has established a trade-off between bread today and reason tomorrow. But she cannot decide a priori that reason tomorrow is the maximizing option for each individual. This depends on unique circumstances. It might, for instance, be reasonable to take bread today if one's option is *death* tomorrow.

Rand's argument for her claim that criterion three cannot be met by theft is reported by her able expositor Leonard Peikoff. According to Peikoff (1991), Rand held that any act of dishonesty requires that the perpetrator lie, pretend, or otherwise fake reality. But since everything in reality is connected to everything else, any attempt to fake one aspect of reality requires more and more acts of dishonesty to shore up the initial act, until finally one is cut off from reality altogether. This, however, could

hardly be called a rational existence. And since the good life for man is a rational life, a life of dishonesty is not a good life. Values, therefore, cannot be gained by force or fraud (270-72).

This argument, however, is weak. It is simply a version of the slippery slope fallacy. But there is no need for the criminal to slip down the slope. First, Rand has to ascribe to the criminal a bizarre concern with consistency at all costs. But why pursue consistency at all costs? Why not, for instance, simply adopt the rule that if one is caught in a lie, one does not try to hide it with another lie, but openly admits it, thereby avoiding the slippery slope and even gaining points for belated honesty? Second, although all facts may be connected, not all facts are *known* or *verifiable*, and the liar need worry only about this subset. Finally, although all known facts may indeed be connected, not all known facts are *relevant* to a particular case, and it is only the relevant facts that need be faked. Rand's slippery slope argument, therefore, fails.

Rand's argument against the use of force and fraud does, therefore, have its limits. It does not rule out gaining values for oneself by force and fraud. But if Rand's account of objective human values (as augmented above) is correct, then she has constructed a case against all forms of paternalism. The burden of the next section is to prove that this case fails.

#### 4. Autonomy Versus Naturalism

Rand's third criterion for the existence of objective human values—autonomous rational cognition—is *not* a necessary condition for the existence of objective human values. Furthermore, insofar as Rand's case against paternalism depends on this key assumption, her case fails; the link between liberty and nature is missing.

My argument that autonomous rational cognition is not a necessary condition for the existence of objective human values is quite simple: I shall offer examples of objective human values and disvalues that do not presuppose autonomous rational cognition. My starting point is a remark by Rasmussen and Den Uyl (1991) illustrating the limits of paternalism:

There may, of course, be circumstances in which it is better that others be in charge of one's life, such as when one undergoes surgery, but this situation would not be a morally good one unless the choice to undergo

surgery was one's own. (95)

Here we have a concrete application of the Objectivist position. If nothing can be of value to me unless I judge it to be a value, then undergoing surgery without my consent is not a value.

Now, consider the following scenario: Leaving a building, you are struck down by a car which you neither saw nor heard coming and therefore could take no actions to avoid. You are knocked unconscious and begin bleeding internally. You are rushed to the hospital and, because of the life-threatening nature of your injuries, emergency surgery is performed before you regain consciousness.

On the Objectivist account, (1) the accident was *not* a disvalue because you did not *evaluate* it as a disvalue, and (2) the surgery was *not* a value because you did not evaluate it as a value and *authorize* the surgeon to perform it. To quote Rasmussen and Den Uyl (1991) again:

There may, of course, be circumstances in which it is better that others be in charge of one's life, such as when one undergoes surgery, but this situation would not be a morally good one *unless the choice to undergo surgery was one's own.* (95, emphasis added)

Furthermore, on Rasmussen and Den Uyl's—and Rand's—account, the surgery is not only *not* a value, it constitutes coercion, a violation of one's rights. After all, a complete stranger has stuck a knife in one's body without one's consent. On the Objectivist account, there is no moral distinction—save one of degree—between an unauthorized surgery that saves one's life and an unauthorized stabbing that endangers one's life. There is no moral difference between the surgeon and Jack the Ripper. On the Objectivist account, then, the only way to respect your autonomy is to let you die in the street.

But that is not reasonable. Being struck by a car is a disvalue whether one *judges* it to be so or not. If anything is a disvalue, being struck by a car is. It is a disvalue because it is a threat to one's life. To say this, moreover, is not to say that being hit by a car is what an Objectivist would call an *intrinsic* disvalue. Being hit by a car is not some moral fact, "out there," independent of us. Rather, it is a fact of reality—a speeding car—in *relation* to an organism's life: one's own. But the speeding car bears this inimical relationship to one's life whether one knows it and judges it to be so or not. Indeed, it is just as much a disvalue

to a human being as it is to a deer or a dog, even though these living things presumably cannot judge anything at all.

Likewise with the emergency surgery. If anything is a value, then a life-saving operation is—*whether one authorizes it or not.* Furthermore, it is not an "intrinsic" value, floating somewhere out there. Rather, it is an objective value: a fact of reality in relation to the requirements of human life. Finally, such surgery would be just as much a value to a human being as it would be to an animal that had been run down, though the animal could not authorize or fail to authorize anything.

Now, one might respond to this as follows. Although the surgery was not authorized, one could still wake up, discover what had happened, and somehow authorize the surgery after the fact. One could, in short, forgive one's surgeon for saving one's life. This response, however, does not work. First, if one were to authorize the operation after the fact, one would, presumably, do so *because it was already a value*; one would not *make* it a value by authorizing it. Second, authorization after the fact is wholly consistent with the goals of paternalism. A paternalist, after all, believes that he is forcing genuine values on people. He believes that, before his intervention, his charges are unable to know and pursue the good unaided. But he holds that once they have attained the good through his interventions, they will look back upon their previous condition with disgust and thank him for helping them to transcend it. They will, in short, authorize paternalistic intervention after the fact. Third, Rasmussen and Den Uyl recognize the paternalism ingredient in authorization after the fact and rule it out on principle, for a "good" achieved by paternalistic means is not really a good at all. They state their opposition to authorization after the fact quite clearly:

... a world which compels people to do the "right" thing [cannot] be viewed as a morally justifiable means to creating a world in which human beings choose the right thing. (95)

I could adduce further scenarios to illustrate my point. For instance, would an asteroid hurtling toward the Earth be a disvalue only after we looked through a telescope and saw it? What if we never looked? Would this console us once the asteroid had struck? Was oxygen not an objective human value before it was discovered and evaluated as such? Or is it the case that our lives depended upon its presence—and were choked

off in its absence—long before Lavoisier?

A second possible response to my argument—a response that will be especially tempting to Rand's followers—would be to insert a distinction between kinds of human values into Rand's account. One could distinguish between moral values and non-moral values.<sup>7</sup> Non-moral values—such as an unauthorized life-saving surgery—do not require autonomous rational judgment. But moral values do. After all, it is widely granted that we cannot be morally praised or blamed for actions that we do not rationally choose to undertake. If, for instance, we were to be forced or tricked into committing some moral offense, this would not make us morally culpable. We would not be bad people, but simply the victims of bad people. So autonomous rational judgment is a necessary condition for the possibility of objective human *moral* values. And, if our primary political concern is the cultivation of human *moral* values, then Rand's case against paternalism can be resuscitated.

Or can it? A thorough explication and refutation of this kind of counter-argument would take us too far afield, so I shall simply point out one important problem. The idea that the achievement of moral goodness presupposes freedom of choice makes the most sense if one regards morality as a set of commandments that must be complied with, or as a set of rules that must be applied. But it makes no sense if one is an Aristotelian who considers moral goodness to be primarily a matter of *virtue*, virtues being acquired and abiding traits of character that give one the capacity to live well. On the Aristotelian account, the moral virtues are habituated propensities to do the right thing *without* reflection, dithering, or deliberation.<sup>8</sup> According to Aristotle, a person can be a good man (*agathos*) simply by having moral virtues. But to be a gentleman (*kalos k'agathos*), one must also develop the intellectual virtue of prudence (*phronesis*), which helps to assure that one's exercise of the moral virtues is appropriate to the contingencies of time and place. Although the acquisition and exercise of prudence requires maturity and autonomy, the moral virtues do not. For the most part, moral virtues are not acquired by one's own choice. Contrary to Rand's dogmatic assertion that "Man is a being of self-made soul,"<sup>9</sup> the core of our character is formed in our earliest years, before we are capable of making responsible choices. Indeed, the proper goal of the process of character-formation is to become the kind of agent who can eventually make rational and responsible choices.

The superiority of the Aristotelian account of moral goodness can be appreciated through the following scenario. William is brought up in a

liberated household and a progressive school. He is not physically punished or publicly humiliated for telling fibs, but simply taken aside and gently admonished in abstract terms: "Honesty is the best policy." "Oh what a tangled web we weave . . ." And so forth. He is neither rewarded for doing good things nor punished for doing bad things, for both tend to produce habits, which compromise his autonomy. Instead, William is taught to take pride only in his cleverness in deciding everything on a case-by-case basis. George, by contrast, is brought up in a strict home and educated in a strict school. He is habituated in truth-telling by being rewarded for telling the truth and punished for telling lies. In later years, when William is tempted to tell a lie, he sizes up the situation. When he decides that honesty is not the best policy *in this case*, he chooses to lie—and he feels no shame for it. And when he decides that it is the best policy, he chooses to tell the truth. By contrast, in most circumstances George goes through life spontaneously and unreflectively telling the truth. And on those occasions when George *is* tempted to lie, he does not consult his conscience or dither about the costs and benefits of lying. Instead, his lips freeze up and he begins to blush. This does not mean that George could not tell a lie to save his life. Having good character does not necessitate stupidity—indeed, to be a gentleman, one must have the prudence to deal with extraordinary situations. But being a gentleman also means that he does not face every moral *option* as a *choice* to be weighed. Nor does good character make bad behavior impossible. George might occasionally tell a lie out of weakness or folly. Good character does, however, mean that he would feel *ashamed* of it. Now, on the account of moral goodness proposed by my imaginary critic, whenever William autonomously chooses to tell the truth, he is more morally praiseworthy than George, who tends to tell the truth merely out of deeply ingrained habit. But this is not reasonable. George is clearly the better person. Of the two, he is the one with whom you would trust your wife or your wallet. He is the one whom you'd call as a witness in your defense or list as a character reference. William's moral autonomy is really an autonomy from morality. It is not the crown of creation. It is a pathological lack of character. If, therefore, one is truly serious about promoting moral goodness, one would not undermine the ethical institutions and practices that build character in the name of protecting autonomous choices. Instead, one would seek to preserve and strengthen the institutions and practices that habituate people into heteronomous *virtues*.

A third possible response to my argument is offered by

Rasmussen and Den Uyl in *Liberty and Nature*:

There are situations in which someone is too young, old, sick, or injured to make such decisions, but these cases do not refute the claim that it is always better for a human being to be self-directed than not to be self-directed. (245 n.55)

This response fails, however, to answer my objection and, in fact, concedes my point. Rasmussen and Den Uyl seem to grant that there are instances in which paternalism is not only necessary, but also productive of objective value. This is precisely my contention. But they argue that this fact does not imply that autonomy is not preferable to paternalism. I agree with this as well. Autonomy, where possible, is always preferable to paternalism. My concern above, however, is to dispute the claim that autonomy is an essential ingredient in every objective value, such that paternalistic violations of autonomy can never, in principle, produce objectively valuable outcomes.

A fourth possible response to my argument was given by Rasmussen and Den Uyl (1993) in answer to similar objections offered by Jeffrey Paul (1993) and Irfan Khawaja (1992):

When we claim that self-direction is always good for each and every human being, we are talking of self-perfection abstractly considered, that is, "described without specific virtues or concrete goods a particular human being's reason or intelligence determines as needed for the specific circumstances in which he finds himself" ([*Liberty and Nature*], 94). We are not claiming that self-direction invariably produces good results or that it cannot result in evil . . . Nor are we claiming that it is impossible for someone who has suffered coercion to nonetheless turn the situation into an opportunity for moral growth by using whatever occasions for self-direction remain. . . . Rather, we are describing the central intrinsic feature of human flourishing and arguing that human flourishing cannot be what it is if it is not a self-directed activity. We are making a claim about the *nature* of human flourishing but not a claim about what may or may not be causal

factors in its existence. (Rasmussen and Den Uyl 1993, 129-30)

The first problem with this response is that it does not address my objection. I do not claim that Rasmussen and Den Uyl hold "that self-direction invariably produces good results or that it cannot result in evil." Rather, they hold that the absence of self-direction always turns a value into a non-value. It is not that "it is impossible for someone who has suffered coercion to nonetheless turn the situation into an opportunity for moral growth by using whatever occasions for self-direction remain." Rather, it is possible—though perhaps not desirable—for genuine values to be foisted upon people without their consent. In short, paternalistic acts need not be injuries that their victims must struggle to overcome. They can be positive goods for which their recipients should be thankful.

The crux of Rasmussen and Den Uyl's response is their distinction between what I shall call the *essence* of human flourishing and the *existence* of human flourishing. Rasmussen and Den Uyl claim that their topic is the *essence* of human flourishing; this is what they mean when they characterize their project as "talking of self-perfection abstractly considered," "describing the central intrinsic feature of human flourishing," and "making a claim about the *nature* of human flourishing." Rasmussen and Den Uyl are articulating the necessary components of human flourishing *in abstracto*. Their central claim is that self-directedness or autonomy is essential to human flourishing. If self-directedness is taken away, we cannot flourish. More precisely, self-directedness is a necessary condition of human flourishing, but it is not a sufficient condition. Although the absence of self-directedness makes human flourishing impossible, its presence does not make human flourishing inevitable. Rasmussen and Den Uyl claim that articulating the essential characteristics of the nature of human flourishing is something altogether different from describing "what may or may not be causal factors in [the] existence [of human flourishing]." In other words, describing in abstract terms the nature of human flourishing is different from describing the causal conditions for concrete instances of human flourishing. Rasmussen and Den Uyl claim that their critics do not see this distinction; therefore, their criticisms miss the mark.

But it is simply a red herring for Rasmussen and Den Uyl to claim that they are talking about human flourishing in the abstract, not in the concrete, for presumably their abstract account is *about something*, namely

concrete human flourishing; therefore, the truth of their abstract account must be determined by its adequacy to the concretes being accounted for. This is especially the case for Rasmussen and Den Uyl, who repeatedly remind us that the essence of human flourishing is not a "Platonic" Form existing by itself; rather, the essence of human flourishing exists only as a necessary and invariant structure—namely the presence of self-directedness—in concrete instances of human flourishing.

In sum, my argument is that some things are objective human values and disvalues *whether we grasp them as such or not*. To claim otherwise, as Rand and her followers must, is *prima facie* unreasonable and therefore requires a much stronger argument than they have offered so far. Furthermore, since the Objectivist argument against paternalism depends upon this claim, it lacks a firm foundation. Indeed, Rand's account of objective value looks like what, in ordinary usage (though not in Rand's stipulated usage), one would call *subjectivism*. Subjectivism, after all, is the view that a fact of reality (in this case an "objective" human value) depends somehow upon one's awareness of it. For Rand, to be a value is (necessarily, though not sufficiently) to be perceived to be a value.

##### 5. Objectivism as Reductionism

Where does the Objectivist argument go wrong? The answer lies in Rand's reductionistic and excessively intellectualistic account of human nature.

Let us return to a crucial stage in Rand's argument: her derivation of man's supreme values and the virtues from her standard of value, man's life *qua* man. If one accepts Rand's argument that man's life *qua* man is the standard of value, then one might expect Rand to carry out her biocentric program by cataloging in detail all the conditions of human life and flourishing. Such an ethics would be a comprehensive art of living, much like ancient Greek ethics.

First, ethics would offer a comprehensive account of human flourishing: physical, psychological, sexual, social, etc. Ethics would thus comprehend all of the sciences that tell us what human nature and human flourishing are: medicine, psychology, anthropology, sociology, etc. It would be especially concerned with developmental issues, seeking to understand the stages of human development and the goods appropriate to each stage. It would also be sensitive to sexual difference, seeking to understand the goods appropriate to each sex. Furthermore, since human beings exist in communities defined by common languages, histories, customs, traditions, practices, and institutions, an ethics genuinely

concerned with the whole of human existence could not remain fixated merely upon biology, but would also have to recognize the role of community, culture, ethnicity, and other spontaneously evolved conventions in both opening up and closing off different possible forms of the good life.

Second, ethics would draw upon this knowledge to formulate a comprehensive set of recommendations and tools for the achievement of human flourishing. In moving from descriptions to prescriptions, such an ethics would no more face a problematic "gap" between "is" and "ought" than does medicine, which diagnoses sicknesses and prescribes treatments by reference to the norm of health. Such an ethics would tell us how to eat right, exercise, make love, raise and educate children, cultivate good character, good taste, and good habits, choose goals, manage time, and achieve self-esteem, financial security, serenity, success, and happiness—all within the context of the particular social and historical settings in which we find ourselves. Ethics would be noted for its scope and breadth along a number of dimensions, its questions starting with the meaning of life and going all the way to etiquette; its tools ranging from abstract principles to CAT scans, from rules of thumb to psychotherapy, from maxims to massages and diets. Its information would range from the scientific to the anecdotal, and its modes of persuasion would range from scientific demonstration to rhetorical exhortations. Its arguments would begin from axioms or observations or commonplaces. It would not, however, become a ponderous, casuistic legalism for the simple reason that virtue does not reside in a scrupulous conscience and is not actualized by rule-following. Virtue, rather, resides in traits of character and is actualized when character is manifested prudently in gaining and keeping the goods of human existence.

Third, ethics would be characterized by "holistic" or "ecological," rather than hierarchical and reductionistic, ways of thinking.<sup>10</sup> Ethics would treat the good life for man as a complex, multifaceted organic whole, each part of which is mutually dependent upon the others, none of which dominates the others, and all of which illuminate and explain the others. In a living organism, each limb, cell, tissue, and organ is both supported by and supportive of every other aspect of the organism. No organ—and no faculty—is the master, standing upon its own and holding up all the rest. The brain cannot function without the heart, the heart without the lungs, the lungs without the digestive system, etc. Each human good is both supported by and supportive of the others. No human good is

absolute and unconditioned, standing upon its own and holding the others up with it. This does not, of course, mean that we cannot live without a finger or a kidney, but it does mean that we cannot be said to flourish when we are cut into pieces. It does not mean that we cannot rank the importance of our body parts either; most of us would prefer to lose a toe than a leg. But when we are talking about which parts of our bodies to cut off, we have left the realm of human flourishing.

Rand, however, takes a very different approach. When she comes to the question of human flourishing, she does not focus on all the features of human life and human flourishing, but only on one feature: reason. From the claim that "*man's life*" is the standard of value, Rand moves directly to the argument that, "Since reason is man's basic means of survival, that which is proper to the life of a rational being is the good; that which negates, opposes or destroys it is the evil" (Rand 1966, 23). Rand's seven virtues and three supreme values are simply concretizations or applications of rationality to the problem of survival.

Rand (1966) thinks this focus on reason is merited because reason is man's *essential* characteristic: "Man's essential characteristic is his rational faculty. Man's mind is his basic means of survival—his only means of gaining knowledge. . . ." (16-17). Rand (1990) concludes that reason is man's essential characteristic in accordance with what she calls "the rule of *fundamentality*," which she explains as follows:

When a given group of existents has more than one characteristic distinguishing it from other existents, man must observe the relationships among these various characteristics and discover the one on which all the others (or the greatest number of others) depend, i.e., the fundamental characteristic without which the others would not be possible. This fundamental characteristic is the *essential* distinguishing characteristic of the existents involved. . . . Metaphysically, a fundamental characteristic is that distinctive characteristic which makes the greatest number of others possible; epistemologically, it is the one that explains the greatest number of others. (45)

In accordance with this rule, Rand argues, for instance, that although only human beings fly airplanes and wear wristwatches, these distinguishing characteristics are not *essential*, for they can both be explained in terms of

a more fundamental feature: reason.

This, then, is clearly a far more austere moral philosophy than the one hypothesized above. The reason for this austerity is, of course, Rand's focus on rationality. But is this focus legitimate? This question can be broken down into two separate questions.

First, is it legitimate to subsume all the distinctive characteristics of humankind under the rubric of rationality? Rand does not *explicitly* claim that reason explains *all* of humankind's distinctive features, but it is reasonable to conclude that she *assumes* that it does. When she talks about the conditions of human flourishing, she speaks *only* about the exercise of reason. Given her biocentric conception of ethics, however, she could do this if and only if she assumed that reason explains all other distinctive human characteristics and the goods appropriate to them, so that in focusing on reason nothing is being left out.

But is this true? To say that reason makes possible many distinctive human characteristics and activities says nothing about what, precisely, these activities are and what, precisely, are the values and actions appropriate to their pursuit and maintenance. Yet this is exactly what is required for a biocentric ethics.

Rand, it seems, conflates the observation that reason makes possible many distinctively human characteristics with the observation of what, precisely, these characteristics are. Rand holds that a concept like "man" refers not simply to man's essential characteristic, rationality, but to all characteristics of all human beings, past, present, and future. But to say that a concept *refers* to all features of its referents does not imply that one can *think of* or *know* all of these features simply by thinking of or knowing the essential characteristic. To say that rationality makes possible lipstick, wristwatches, and democratic republics does not imply that these can be *deduced* from rationality. Or, to be more precise, these can be deduced from rationality only if one holds the Leibnizian position that all of a thing's accidents can be deduced from one's intuitive knowledge of its essence. But Rand would reject this principle. One cannot deduce all concrete human differences from rationality. These must be discovered empirically. And, given Rand's conception of ethics, this is a necessary and inescapable task—a task to which she and her followers have paid scant attention.

Second, is it legitimate to define the human good solely in terms of features *distinctive* to humankind? The human difference is *rationality*. The human genus is *animal*. Even if Rand could meaningfully account for

all human differences in terms of rationality, she certainly cannot account for the human *genus* in the same terms. Yet, it is obviously true that many dimensions of human flourishing are shared with animals. The needs for food, shelter, companionship, sex, social solidarity, individual initiative, and nurture are shared with some or all species of animals. Some are even shared with plants. Now, granted, in humans, reason is involved in discovering what these needs are and how they can be satisfied. But to say that reason is involved in discovering and satisfying these needs is not to tell us what, precisely, these needs are and how, precisely, they are to be satisfied. Further investigation is needed, and this investigation is inescapably empirical in nature and moral in import. Until such investigation has been carried out, Rand's ethics is in danger of resurrecting the dichotomy between soul and body, which she rejects, in the form of a dichotomy between man's *genus* (animal = body) and man's *differentia* (rational = soul).

Having substituted the empirically more austere concept of freedom for an empirically rich description of human nature, Rand then replaces the concept of reason with the even more austere concept of volition, will, or freedom, on the assumption that the employment of reason is ultimately a matter of choice. When Rand claims that reason is man's essential characteristic, she claims that all aspects of human existence are made possible by reason and can thus be explained by reference to it. If, therefore, she can understand what is good for the rational faculty, she can understand what is good for man as a whole. Freedom is good for the rational faculty. Freedom makes reason possible. Since the rational faculty makes possible all other features of human existence, freedom makes all of human existence possible. Specifically, freedom is a necessary condition for the existence of all objective human values. But, as we have seen, this conclusion is just not plausible.

The only way to avoid this problem is to avoid the reductionistic move at its root: to deny (1) that all distinctively human features are made possible by reason and can be explained by reference to it, and (2) that the human good must be defined solely in terms of features distinctive of human beings, without making reference to those broader generic features that we share with other animals and even with plants. Reductionistic rationalism must be replaced by a holistic and ecological understanding of the role of reason in human existence. Reason should not be understood as the dominant good from which all other goods are derived, but as just one essential aspect of the good life, both supported by and supportive of the other aspects. This sort of approach would allow those objective

human goods that do not require the exercise of autonomous rational judgment to come to light.

#### 6. Rand: Aristotelian or Baconian?

Rand's reductionistic and rationalistic conception of human nature introduces a contradiction into her account of the relationships of nature, reason, and the will. As an Aristotelian, Rand (1982) affirms the priority of what she calls the "metaphysical" (i.e., the natural) over the "man-made" (i.e., the artificial, the conventional) (23-34). By this, she means not only that man's will and creativity are constrained by natural necessities, but also by natural *norms*; our choices are governed not only by what naturally *is*, but also by what naturally *ought to be*. In terms of human faculties, this means that will and creativity must be governed by the faculty which discovers what naturally is and ought to be. That faculty is reason. In other words, reason has primacy over the will. Yet, Rand (1961) asserts that, "To think is an act of choice. . . . [M]an is a being of *volitional consciousness*" (146). Man, in short, has the choice to be rational or not, and since this choice is prior to the exercise of rationality, it cannot be determined by an appeal to rational grounds, or by a rational appeal to natural grounds, including natural norms; thus the choice to use reason is ultimately irrational or absurd. In short, will has primacy over reason. Rand's Aristotelian moral philosophy presupposes the primacy of reason and nature over the will. Her libertarian political philosophy, however, presupposes the priority of the will over reason and nature.

Rand's political commitment to the protection of freedom of the will as such, whether or not it follows the guidance of reason and nature, presupposes a modern Baconian conception of the place of man in the natural world, not a classical Aristotelian model. For Aristotle, nature is an eternal and immutable order that sets fixed boundaries, both factual and normative, to the realm of human action. By contrast, for the modern project of "the mastery and possession of nature" inaugurated by Bacon and Descartes, the natural consists, in theoretical terms, simply of the latest scientific findings and problems and, in practical terms, of the latest obstacles encountered to the expansion of human technological power—but always with the understanding that these limits can, in principle, be forever pushed back by the progress of scientific knowledge and technological power. For an Aristotelian, man himself has a nature, a nature which encompasses both body and soul, and which sets objective normative limits on human action. The first wave of modern philosophers, from Bacon and

Descartes to Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke, and Hume, agree with Aristotle to some extent, but with a crucial proviso: human nature provides normative limits and guidance to the unfolding mastery and possession of nature, but it is not human reason or human pride, but human *desire* that provides these limits. Reason, science, and technology are to be the slaves of the passions, they are to be to the desires as scouts and spies. Human desire, however, cannot ultimately provide normative limits to the mastery of nature, for human nature itself, our desires included, is one of the primary objects of scientific research and technological transformation. With Bacon and Descartes, health and longevity take their place among humanity's primary goals. Furthermore, as Bacon foresaw, the progress of biology and medicine will eventually lead, not just to the health and perfection of natural kinds, but to the transformation of natural kinds into artificial beings. Thus, the transformation of nature cannot be governed by human nature, once human nature itself can be transformed according to the priorities of . . . what? Ultimately, the only answer can be: the will, a will that can, eventually, will that it no longer be a *human* will, or any *kind* of will at all, but can instead aspire to enthrone itself as the center of the cosmos from which it can oversee the progressive transformation of the natural world into an artificial world in accordance with the priorities which it draws from . . . nowhere, from nowhere but its own ungrounded autonomy.<sup>11</sup>

Rand's lapse from an Aristotelian to a Baconian conception of nature is apparent in her defense of abortion on demand, particularly in her essay "Of Living Death," a breathtakingly vitriolic critique of the Papal Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, a text which appeals to an Aristotelian-Thomistic natural law ethic in its condemnation of birth control and abortion. According to Rand (1988), however, man's biological nature has no normative importance:

It is only animals that have to adapt themselves to their physical background and to the biological functions of their bodies. Man adapts his physical background and the use of his biological faculties to himself—to his own needs and values. *That* is his distinction from all other living species. (55)

Note that man's environment and his body are placed together *in opposition* to "himself," i.e., his "own needs and values." What man really is, therefore, is a mind with a set of preferences, and, since Rand holds that

values are *chosen*, what is really ultimate is the will. The body is demoted to the same level as the environment, i.e., to the status of raw material for the satisfaction of preferences; it is demoted to being merely a vehicle for the expression of the will. Rand's commitment to "biocentric" Aristotelianism requires she treat man's life qua man, including his body and biological functions, as normative, as the standard of value. Her reduction of life to freedom, however, demotes the body and its biological functions to a mere stockpile of resources to be reworked by the will. But given this degraded conception of the body, how can an understanding of man's biological nature serve as a norm, as a foundation for ethics? How can a mere means be part of the standard, i.e., an end in itself? And if none of man's "needs and values" are derived from his body and its biological processes, then from what realm are they derived?

Rand's affirmation of a Baconian instead of an Aristotelian conception of man's place in nature is not merely an accidental departure from her core convictions; it reveals her real core convictions. In her essays, "Philosophy and Sense of Life" (Rand 1975c) and "Art and Sense of Life" (Rand 1975a), Rand claims that the purpose of art is to give concrete, sensuous expression to one's "sense of life," which she describes as "a pre-conceptual equivalent of metaphysics, an emotional, subconsciously integrated appraisal of man and of existence. It sets the nature of a man's emotional responses and the essence of his character" (Rand 1975c, 25). In her essay, "The Goal of My Writing" (Rand 1975b) she makes it abundantly clear that the purpose of her own art is to give concrete expression to her own sense of life in the form of an image of the ideal man: "The motive and purpose of my writing is the projection of an ideal man. The portrayal of a moral ideal, as my ultimate literary goal, as an end in itself—to which any didactic, intellectual or philosophical values contained in a novel are only the means" (162). From this we can infer that Rand's metaphysical core convictions, her "sense of life," are most clearly expressed in the images of her novels, and that her later philosophical essays merely attempt, more or less adequately, to articulate conceptually what she has projected concretely in her novels.

Thus, it is to Rand's novels that we must turn for our answer, and the sense of life they project is clearly more Baconian than Aristotelian. Consider, for example, the striking allegorical presentation of the Baconian conception of man's place in nature on the opening pages of *The Fountainhead*:

Howard Roark laughed.  
He stood naked at the edge of a cliff. . . .

The lake below was only a thin steel ring that cut the rocks in half. The rocks went on into the depth, unchanged. They began and ended in the sky. So that the world seemed suspended in space, an island floating on nothing, anchored to the feet of the man on the cliff. (Rand 1968, 3)

Here, Rand uses the optical illusion of the rock suspended in the sky to communicate what is for her a metaphysical truth: that man is the center of the cosmos, and that everything properly revolves around him. If one were to give symbolic expression to the Aristotelian conception of the place of man in nature, one would have to put the world in the center and anchor man to it. For Rand, however, it is man who is the center of the world, and the world is anchored to his feet. Man, however, has not always been at the center of the world. This is his ongoing project. How does man make himself the center of the world? Through the scientific penetration and the technological mastery of nature:

[Roark] looked at the granite. To be cut, he thought, and made into walls. He looked at a tree. To be split and made into rafters. He looked at a streak of rust on the stone and thought of iron ore under the ground. To be melted and to emerge as girders against the sky.

These rocks, he thought, are here for me; waiting for the drill, the dynamite and my voice; waiting to be split, ripped, pounded, reborn; waiting for the shape my hands will give them. (4)

At the end of *The Fountainhead*, the cliff has been replaced by Roark's skyscraper, the Wynand Building, which Roark's wife Dominique ascends, past "the pinnacles of bank buildings . . . the crowns of courthouses . . . the spires of churches," until she sees "only the ocean and the sky and the figure of Howard Roark" (727). Rand makes it abundantly clear that Howard Roark is an image of the ideal man, thus his path from the natural world to a world of his own creation maps the ideal trajectory of human history.

## 7. An Alternative

Rand's attempt to found Lockean liberty on Aristotelian nature fails. Rand's crucial claim—that the exercise of autonomous rational judgment is a necessary condition of the existence of objective human values—is simply false. It is a mistake resulting from a reductionistic and excessively intellectualistic account of human nature. Furthermore, to the extent that the arguments of Machan, Rasmussen and Den Uyl, and others depend on this claim, they too fail.<sup>12</sup>

A merely negative critique is, however, bound to remain unsatisfying if no concrete alternative is in the offing. This is especially the case with a project as interesting as Rand's. The idea of defending modern civil society on the foundation of some form of Aristotelianism is an extremely promising alternative to Hobbesian, Kantian, Utilitarian, and emotivist approaches to political philosophy—especially for those who, like me, have been convinced by Alasdair MacIntyre that the sterile and unending controversies of modern moral philosophy result from the loss of the teleological context outside of which questions of values simply make no sense.<sup>13</sup> If MacIntyre is right, then modern moral philosophers just don't know what they are talking about, and we had best look elsewhere for solutions. Interesting though her project is, Rand's execution is flawed by rationalism and reductionism, raising the question of what would a non-reductionistic, non-rationalistic Aristotelian defense of modern civil society look like?

Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* is a promising model. Hegel's account of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*), with its emphasis on the character-forming functions of concrete institutions and practices, can incorporate those features of Aristotelian ethics that make it superior to modern alternatives—for instance, the teleological definition of value, the emphasis on the primacy of practical reason, the accounts of virtue and vice, of strength and weakness of the will, and of the role of education into tradition and concrete ethical institutions and practices. But Hegel's *Sittlichkeit*, unlike the classical *polis*, incorporates not only the family and the state, but also modern civil society, i.e., the realm of voluntary interaction, including the market economy, for which Hegel had a profound appreciation—not as a morally "neutral" framework for the individual pursuit of differing conceptions of the good life, but as an ethical institution that forms a particular kind of character in accordance with a particular conception of the good life for man.

Hegel's holistic and dialectical approach to articulating modern ethical life eschews all forms of ethical reductionism, allowing each aspect of the human good to come to light and accounting for it in its own terms, never claiming that one thing is "nothing but" something else. Hegel can thus appreciate modern civil society as a necessary aspect of the good life—while at the same time avoiding the liberal vice of claiming that the kinds of values and relationships appropriate to civil society are normative for all human relationships, thus giving rise to such deformations of political legitimacy as social contract theories and such social pathologies as the reduction of relationships of blood and marriage to transient, self-interested commercial contracts.

An Hegelian account of the place of liberty in nature may not be able to give us the kind of rights-based libertarianism that Rand and her followers want. But if Michael Oakeshott's appropriations of Hegel can serve as a guide, Hegel can take us as close as one can reasonably go.<sup>14</sup>

#### NOTES

1. Rasmussen and Den Uyl 1997 is also reprinted in its entirety in Rowley 1997.
2. There is a debate in Objectivist circles between those who hold that the morally important alternative is between life and death (e.g., David Kelley) and those who hold that the alternative between flourishing and not flourishing is also important (e.g., Rasmussen and Den Uyl). For a statement of this issue by a partisan of the former option, see Kelley 1992, a review of Rasmussen and Den Uyl's *Liberty and Nature*. For a defense of the latter option, see Johnson 1992.
3. Rand's equivalent of the "Unmoved Mover" is the "immortal, indestructible robot . . . which cannot be affected by anything, which cannot be changed in any respect, which cannot be damaged, injured or destroyed . . ." and, therefore, "would not be able to have any values" (Rand 1964, 16). (For a useful explication of this point, see Peikoff 1991, 209-11.)
4. It is, admittedly, odd to speak of the "knowledge" of plants, but perhaps Rand would claim that it consists in the trophic tendencies for roots to grow downward into the soil and leaves to grow upward toward the sun, and the seasonal cycles of growth and reproduction.
5. David Kelley (1986) calls this criterion of cognitive efficacy the "diaphanous" conception of consciousness (37-42).
6. It should be noted that while Rand is committed to the hopeless quasi-Hobbesian task of arguing that respecting other people's rights and refraining from exploiting them is always in our self-interest, both Tibor R. Machan (1989) and Rasmussen and Den Uyl (1991) recognize the impossibility of this task and seek to offer much more plausible reasons for respecting the rights of others. Machan argues that rationality requires that we respect the

rights of others because their rights are based on the same common human nature that one's own are. See Machan 1989, 58-59. See also Machan's exchange with Eyal Mozes: Mozes 1992 and Machan 1992. Rasmussen and Den Uyl argue that rights are "meta-normative" principles that set the boundaries of prudential action, but are not themselves the objects of prudential consideration. It is, in short, simply a category error to demand prudential reasons for individuals to respect one another's rights. See Rasmussen and Den Uyl 1991, 105-6, 111.

7. Tibor Machan (1989) makes a distinction between "value and moral value" in responding to an argument by Peter Winch (54). Judging from the fact that Machan draws this distinction between plants and animals on the one hand and humans on the other hand on the grounds that the former do not possess reason and free will and the latter do, his distinction seems to be identical with Rand's distinction between human and non-human objective values. The distinction drawn by my imaginary opponent, however, is different. It is a distinction between moral and non-moral values within the realm of objective human values.

8. Rand is clearly not an Aristotelian in her account of the moral virtues.

9. See the passages gathered in the entry on "Free Will" in Rand 1986, 177-80.

10. For a provocative critique of the "hierarchical" understanding of human values characteristic of Greek ethics in favor of a non-hierarchical holistic or ecological approach, see Riker 1991.

11. The most profound and lucid statement of the nihilistic implications of the Baconian project of the mastery and possession of nature from the point of view of classical natural law ethics is the title lecture of C. S. Lewis's *The Abolition of Man* (1947). Rand's vitriolic and embarrassingly uncomprehending reactions to this book are recorded in Rand 1995, 90-94.

12. I have already indicated how Rasmussen and Den Uyl's argument depends upon Rand's account of objective value. Machan's dependence on Rand's account is stated most clearly in *Individuals and their Rights*:

Since . . . the process of rational thought . . . must come about by way of willful choice . . . unlike the [case of] the organic processes of growth in a plant, we do have occasion to classify the sort of good that this process brings about as a moral good . . . As I have emphasized, it is the element of choice involved in the seeking of something objectively good that introduces the moral dimension. (Machan 1989, 54-55)

Although Machan's use of the words "something objectively good" is not in accord with Rand—who would not call something objectively good unless and until it is autonomously chosen—his conceptual point is the same.

Tara Smith (1995) provides a faithful summary of Rand's position, with all its weaknesses, in her *Moral Rights and Political Freedom*: "1. Human life requires productive effort. 2. Productive effort requires reasoned action. 3. Reasoned action is individual and self-

authored. 4. Reasoned action requires freedom. 5. Thus if we wish to live in a society in which individuals are to have a chance to maintain their lives, we must recognize individual rights to freedom" (33; see also 34-42).

13. See MacIntyre 1984, especially Chapters 2-5.

14. See especially Oakeshott 1975.

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