

Rand on Obligation and Value

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In 1990, I presented a paper before the Ayn Rand Society of the American Philosophical Association (Eastern Division) entitled “Rand on Obligation and Value,” wherein I discussed the relationship between Rand’s theory of obligation and her theory of value.¹ I asked: What is the relationship between her account of how one determines what one ought to do and her account of what is of ultimate value? I did not offer a definitive answer to the question, but I sought to initiate a deeper examination of Rand’s position.

Because Objectivist philosophers—including Leonard Peikoff (1991, 244–45, 248), Allan Gotthelf (2000, 84), and Tara Smith (2000, 94, 104–11)—continue to insist that ethics depends upon a “pre-moral” choice to live, they continue to champion a view that I have always found problematic. Given that the issues remain current, I present here, in print, for the first time, my examination of the issues at hand—in the hopes of furthering a dialogue.

Rand’s Theory of Obligation

Let us consider the following statements by Rand regarding the source of obligation:

My morality, the morality of reason, is contained in a single axiom: existence exists—and in a single choice: to live. The rest proceeds from these. (Rand 1961, 128)

Life or death is man’s only fundamental alternative. To live is his basic act of choice. If he chooses to live, a rational ethics will tell him what principles of action are required to implement his choice. If he does not choose to live, nature

will take its course.

Reality confronts man with a great many "musts," but all of them are conditional; the formula for realistic necessity is: "You must, if—" and "if" stands for man's choice: "—if you want to achieve a certain goal." You must eat, if you want to survive. You must work, if you want to eat. You must think—if you want to work. You must look to reality, if you want to think—if you want to know what to do—if you want to know what goals to choose—if you want to know how to achieve them. ("Causality Versus Duty" (1970) in Rand 1982, 118–19)

It would appear from these statements, especially the one from her essay, "Causality Versus Duty," that Rand is rejecting the idea that one can have any moral obligations apart from one's choice to attain a goal. Indeed, later in the same essay she describes the man who follows her ethics as "[a]ccepting no mystic 'duties' or unchosen obligations[.] [H]e is the man who honors scrupulously the obligations which *he* chooses" (121). All moral necessity would seem then to be of the hypothetical variety for Rand. It follows from one's choice to live.

Rand also endorses the idea that it is the goal of an action that determines the proper means. She has, to say the least, no use for deontologism.² She rejects in toto the idea that moral obligation could stem from duty alone, apart from a consideration of a person's goals, motives, desires, interests, and needs.

In order to make the choices required to achieve his goals, a man needs the constant, automatized awareness of the principle which the anti-concept "duty" has all but obliterated in his mind: the principle of causality—specifically, of Aristotelian *final causation* (which, in fact, applies only to a conscious being), i.e., the process by which an end determines the means, i.e., the process of choosing a goal and taking the actions necessary to achieve it.

In a rational ethics, it is causality—not "duty"—that serves as the guiding principle in considering, evaluating, and choosing one's actions, particularly those necessary to achieve a long-range goal. . . . In choosing a goal, he considers the means required to achieve it, he weighs the value of the goal against the difficulties of the means and against the full, hierarchical context of all his other values and goals. (119) . . . The notion of "duty" is intrinsically anti-causal. In its origin, a "duty" defies the principle of efficient causation—since it is causeless (or supernatural); in its effects, it defies the principle of final causation—since it is performed regardless of the consequences. (121)

Thus, Rand's theory of obligation seems consequentialistic.³ What determines whether an action ought to be taken depends on whether it will attain the goal chosen by the person. There can be no such thing as doing something from a motive of duty, viz., simply because one ought to.

Of the many issues raised by Rand's comments regarding the nature of obligation, the one that seems to be of primary importance is the claim that moral obligation is hypothetical in character. This leads to a most unusual situation for Rand's ethics—namely, that one can, so to speak, choose to opt out of the "moral game." If all moral obligations are hypothetical in character, that is, if the determination of what we ought or ought not do is only possible if we have chosen to live, then the decision to either live or not to live would seem incapable of moral evaluation by Rand's ethics. No reasons or recommendations could be given as to why one ought to choose to live or choose not to live. Choosing to live or choosing not to live would seem to be an ultimate human option that is beyond the scope of ethics. Morally speaking, the choice not to live would be just as good (or bad) as the choice to live. Or, so it seems.

Nathaniel Branden in his essay, "The Moral Revolution in *Atlas Shrugged*," states that "[t]he man who does not wish to hold life as his goal and standard is free not to hold it; but he cannot claim the sanction of reason: he cannot claim that his *choice* is as valid as any

other. It is not 'arbitrary,' it is not 'optional,' whether or not man accepts his nature as a living being—just as it is not 'arbitrary' or 'optional' whether or not he accepts reality" (in Branden and Branden 1962, 27; emphasis added). Yet, as far as morality is concerned, why is the choice not to live not as valid as any other? Why is it not arbitrary or optional whether a man accepts his nature as a living being or not? Why cannot the rejection of life as one's goal claim the sanction of reason? Is Branden claiming somehow that one ought to choose to live? What does Branden mean by "sanction of reason," by "valid"?

Branden notes that Rand, by identifying the context in which values arise existentially, demonstrates how an "ought" can be derived from an "is." He explains that for a person

not to hold man's life as one's standard for moral judgment is to be guilty of a logical contradiction. It is only to a living entity that things can be good or evil; life is the basic value that makes all other values possible; the value of life is not justified by a value beyond itself; to demand such justification—to ask: Why should man choose to live?—is to have dropped the meaning, context and source of one's concepts. "Should" is a concept that can have no intelligible meaning, if divorced from the concept and value of life. (26–27)

The argument seems to be that if one tries to value something apart from accepting the basic value of life, which for a human being is man's survival qua man, one is guilty of an inconsistency. If life is the basic value that makes all other values possible, including even one's valuing not to live, then a person who prefers not to live is implicitly accepting the value of life. Thus, the person who chooses not to live cannot claim the sanction of reason. He is involved in a contradiction,⁴ and since his activity of choosing not to live involves a contradiction, logically his choice is not "valid."

While we may have questions about whether life is the basic value that makes all other values possible—and indeed about what this claim actually amounts to when it comes to human beings—let us

grant it, for that is not the issue here. Rather, the issue concerns the primacy of choice in Rand's ethics. If all judgments regarding what a person ought or ought not do are only possible if that person first chooses to live, and if we are dealing with someone who chooses not to live, then what force does the logical evaluation of his choice as involving an inconsistency have? In other words, what difference does it make to a person if he is told, "You are guilty of a contradiction," if the possibility of "oughts" or "shoulds" for that person is dependent on his first choosing to live? If he actually can choose *not* to live, and if no obligation can exist without the choice to live, then being told that he is inconsistent would make no difference to his conduct. What would be the point of making such logical evaluations if this person is not also subject to moral evaluations? How could the logical evaluation of inconsistency get a person to change his beliefs or conduct, unless he *ought* not to commit contradictions?⁵ To the person who chooses *not* to live, and who, thus, has no obligations, the logical evaluations—"inconsistent" and "invalid"—do not obligate him to alter his choice. He has neither reason nor motivation.

From the perspective of morality, it seems that, despite Branden's claims, the choice to live is ultimately optional or arbitrary. There is no reason why one should choose to live or choose not to live. And if this is true, then Rand's derivation of an "ought" from an "is" seems of limited value: if I choose to live, then I ought to do such and such, but since there can be no obligation without this choice, there is nothing, either logically or morally, that obligates me to choose to live and thus no reason to be moral. Possibly, there was something to Hazel E. Barnes (1967) including a chapter on "Objectivist Ethics" in her book, *An Existentialist Ethics*. Morality seems to be based on an irrational or *arational* commitment—the very thing Rand vehemently rejects.

Yet, it might be said that this conclusion is too quickly made. If it is true that logically one cannot value anything without valuing that which makes such valuation possible, and if life is the very thing that makes valuation possible, then the value of "life" is implicit in any choice or valuation a person makes, and thus in making *any* choice, one chooses to live. Even the person who chooses not to live

thereby values and chooses life implicitly. Thus, it may be said that virtually everyone alive chooses to live. Only those who literally can make no choices would be outside the moral arena. But this, of course, is not unusual. Morality is generally understood as only applying to chosen actions. Thus, though Rand's "oughts" are only hypothetical imperatives, they apply to virtually everyone. Since the choice to live is so implicit or deep, it is not as easy to opt out of ethics as it first appeared.

This reply is not, however, sufficient. It only pushes the issue back another step, because it should now be asked: What does it mean to say that life as a value is *implicit* in any choice a person makes?⁶ The point here is that "implicit" has to refer to more than a logical condition for something to be a value. The argumentative punch of the claim that the value of life is "implicit" in any choice has to be able to produce more than a charge of inconsistency against the person who fails to value that which makes any valuation possible. As I've already observed, if obligations are possible only on the condition of the choice to live, it is not at all clear how being guilty of a contradiction will make any difference to the belief or conduct of one who chooses not to live.

Further, just what does it mean to say that in making any choice, a person chooses to live? If the person who chooses not to live insists that he is not choosing life, how are we to say that his actions are for the sake of more than he claims for them? We might say that logically this person's choice has certain presuppositions and these must be part of his choice, but again how does that show that he ought to regard his action as being for the sake of something more? The ends of a person's actions seem to be entirely determined by what he says they are for, so the existentialist "flavor" of Rand's theory of obligation remains.

Rand's Theory of Value

I believe that something has gone wrong here, and I believe it is the assumption that there can be no obligation without the choice to live. Further, I believe that what Rand is claiming in "Causality

Versus Duty" is subject to a different interpretation than what has so far been presented, and I will get to that eventually. Yet, I think the best way to proceed now is to come at the question of what grounds obligation from another direction. So, let us consider these questions: Is life a value because we choose it, or do we choose life because it is a value? Is choice the cause of life being a value, or is life the value that is ultimately the cause of choice? The basis for answers to these questions appear to be found in the following well-known statement by Rand:

An *ultimate* value is that final goal or end to which all lesser goals are the means—and it sets the standard by which all lesser goals are *evaluated*. An organism's life is its *standard of value*. That which furthers its life is the *good*, that which threatens it is the *evil*.

Without an ultimate goal or end, there can be no lesser goals or means: a series of means going off into an infinite progression toward a nonexistent end is a metaphysical and epistemological impossibility. It is only an ultimate goal, an *end in itself*, that makes the existence of values possible. Metaphysically, *life* is the only phenomenon that is an end in itself: a value gained and kept by a constant process of action. Epistemologically, the concept of "value" is genetically dependent upon and derived from the antecedent concept of "life." To speak of "value" as apart from "life" is worse than a contradiction in terms. "It is only the concept of 'Life' that makes the concept of 'Value' possible."

In answer to those philosophers who claim that no relation can be established between ultimate ends or values and the facts of reality, let me stress that the fact that living entities exist and function necessitates the existence of values and of an ultimate value which for any given living entity is its own life. Thus the validation of value judgments is to be achieved by reference to the facts of reality. The fact that a living

entity *is*, determines what it *ought* to do. So much for the relation between "*is*" and "*ought*." ("The Objectivist Ethics" (1961) in Rand 1964, 17)

Clearly, Rand is claiming that in reality there is something that is by its very nature an end in itself, an ultimate value, and this is life. It is the only phenomenon that is an end in itself or ultimate value. Life is the end or value that makes all other ends or values possible. It is the ultimate goal of a living thing's actions. Further, since "life" does not exist in the abstract, this means that for any living entity, its life is the ultimate end or value for its actions. Nowhere in this passage does Rand claim that the existence of life as the ultimate end, goal, or value is dependent on choice. Life is not a value because we choose it, but rather because of what it is—"[m]etaphysically, *life* is . . . an end in itself: a value gained and kept by a constant process of action" (17).

This claim requires, of course, much explanation, and this brief paper is not the place for it. However, it is important for our purposes to consider if this claim conflicts with Branden's observation that "[i]n no sense does Ayn Rand regard any particular value as a metaphysical given, as pre-existing in man or in the universe" (in Branden and Branden 1962, 28). The crucial words in Branden's observation are, of course, "particular value." Life is the ultimate end or value, but this does not require that life be a particular end or value. Rather, it is an inclusive end or value. Life is an activity that is constituted by actions that are both productive of and expressive of it. Life is not some dominant end, separate and apart from the activities that make it up.⁷ Nor is life, to use a term many readers of Rand are familiar with, an "intrinsic" value. It is something that is attained by the actions of a living thing, but life is not some thing that exists apart from this action. Branden's observation, then, does not seem to conflict with the claim that metaphysically, life is an end in itself.

As is well known, Rand holds that it is the specific nature or identity of a living being that determines which ends or values are proper for it. That which is required for man's survival *qua* man is

the standard of value for a human being. It is this standard that determines what is good or bad for a human being.

That which his survival requires is set by his nature and is not open to his choice. What *is* open to his choice is only whether he will discover it or not, whether he will choose right goals and *values* or not. (Rand 1964, 22)

The proper values or ends for a human being are not open to choice, according to Rand. Choice itself does not determine the end and standard by which choices are judged. Rather, choices are judged in terms of the end and standard of man's life. Choice is not the cause of the ultimate value of life, but life as the ultimate end is the cause—in the sense of creating the need for—the activity that is choice. It is by choosing, which for Rand ultimately refers to attaining and maintaining a conceptual focus regarding the world, that the life which is proper to a man is attained.

Nothing is given to man on earth except a potential and the material on which to actualize it. The potential is a superlative machine: his consciousness; but it is a machine without a spark plug, the self-starter and the driver; *he* has to discover how to use it and *he* has to keep it in constant action . . . [E]verything he needs or desires has to be learned, discovered and produced by *him*—by his own choice, by his own effort, by his own mind. (22)

A human consciousness is a potentiality that can only be actualized through an individual's own choice, and though it is through choice that human life and values come to actually exist, choice nonetheless has a function or end in terms of which it can be judged. Thus, when Rand states that man has to be man by choice and that he has to hold his life as a value by choice (23), she is speaking of choice—the exercise of mind—as necessary to actualize a potential. She is not saying that choice creates the potential or sets its own end.

Choice is crucial in attaining the ultimate value or end of a man's

life qua man, but choice is not necessary for man's life to be the end or goal of human life. Choice does not determine the ultimate end of choice. This is the result of man's nature as a living being. The goal and standard of human life is man's survival qua man. This is, to put it plainly and controversially, man's natural end.⁸ This is the Aristotelian "flavor" of Rand's ethics.

Yet, if this is so, then we need to reexamine the situation we faced earlier—namely, is it true that no moral evaluation can be made of the choice not to live? The answer now is "no." Since the goal and standard of human choice is man's life, moral evaluation of this choice, and any choice, is possible. We can even say that a person ought to choose to live.⁹ There is no need of some value beyond life for this evaluation to be made. Rather, living as a human being—man's life—is the goal and standard set by our nature. If we return to the argument advanced by Branden against the person who chooses not to live, it can now be seen that being guilty of a contradiction does have force for this person. Even though this person chooses not to live, his activity of choosing has an end regardless of whether he intends it or not.¹⁰ Man's life qua man is the ultimate end or goal of human action. This means that, for this person, living his life according to the principles his nature requires—e.g., not committing contradictions—is good for him. There is nothing else in terms of which a reason can be given for why something ought or ought not to be done.¹¹ The obligation not to commit contradictions comes from a consideration of what is good for this person.¹² It is not from his choice or from a consideration of the "demands" of logic.

Reconsidering "Causality Versus Duty"

Branden speaks of the choice not to live. I do also, but in the passage quoted from "Causality Versus Duty" Rand speaks of someone either choosing to live or not choosing to live. Strictly speaking, not choosing is not a choice. This is an important difference. Not choosing involves no course of action being taken. This is sheer passivity. There is nothing to evaluate. Choosing not to X, even not to choose, is capable of evaluation. A course of action has

been taken. It is not clear that Rand means what she literally says—that is, that she means "not choosing to live" as opposed to "choosing not to live." If she does, then there would be no reason to specify the choice in terms of life, for it would be choosing as opposed to not choosing that would make the principles of a rational ethics applicable, not the object of this choice. Yet, given (1) the fundamental value that life represents, (2) Rand's understanding of choice as the exercise of one's conceptual capacity, and (3) Rand's claim that it is only through the exercise of one's conceptual capacity that a person can live as a human being, it might be that she sees no difference between choosing and choosing to live. I am not sure what she means.

It should also be noted that the assumption that created the existentialist "flavor" of Rand's theory of obligation is the claim that judgments about what someone ought or ought not do are only possible if a person chooses to live. In other words, choosing to live is a necessary condition for the existence of obligation. Let us call this claim, "CNO." Is this claim, CNO, actually being made in the passages quoted? Rand states that (A) if one chooses to live, then a rational ethics will tell one what principles of action to follow (viz., a rational ethics will be one's standard of moral evaluation). Further, she states that (B) if one does not choose to live, then nature will take its course. She does not, however, state that (C) if one does not choose to live, then a rational ethics will not tell one the principles of action to follow. Neither does she say that (D) if one chooses not to live, then a rational ethics will not tell one the principles of action to follow. Further, (C) is not implied by either (A) or (B), or even (A) and (B). The same is true for (D). Yet, in order for CNO to be made, Rand has to be claiming either (C) or (D). From what I can tell, she claims neither. Thus, maybe her theory of obligation is consistent with what seems to be the central feature of her theory of value—that is, the belief that man's life is the goal and standard for human choice.

Finally, it must be remembered that Rand is attacking Kant's duty ethics in this essay, and she is emphasizing how morality has to be related to the needs, interests, and goals of an individual.¹³ I do not

think, however, she needs to be interpreted as advocating that we can only know that we should practice the virtues required by a rational ethics after considering the consequences of a specific action. Nor am I sure that her moral principles—specifically the virtues that man's survival qua man require—are merely rules that a consideration of consequences has dictated. In other words, I am skeptical whether consequentialism best captures Rand's theory of obligation. It seems to me that virtue and value are too intimately related in Rand for her view of obligation to be seen as consequentialistic, but this must be an issue for another day.

Some Concluding Thoughts

In 1990, Allan Gotthelf responded directly to my initial challenge in his reply before the Ayn Rand Society of the American Philosophical Association. Though Gotthelf does not now accept all the formulations of his unpublished reply, he raises a few important issues that have been acknowledged in print with his approval.¹⁴ Indeed, he continues to adhere to the view that “[m]orality rests on a fundamental, pre-moral choice” (Gotthelf 2000, 84). Strictly speaking, however, as Sciabarra (1995, 241) observes, for Gotthelf, “life is not a value because we choose it, nor do we choose life because it is a value. For Gotthelf, as for Rand, there are no human values apart from human choice.” Sciabarra quotes Gotthelf:

The whole point of Ayn Rand's derivation of “ought” from “is,” as it applies to humans, is that *if* you choose to exist, *then* you can consistently pursue that choice, and any other particular choice, only by holding life as your ultimate value—because life, by its nature, requires a specific course of action; only that fact about life gives point to any act of evaluation, any reason to choose—any basis for a *concept of value*. But that fact about life has no implication for action to beings who choose not to exist. The choice to live and the nature of life *together* ground the status of one's life as one's actual, and only rational, ultimate value. (Gotthelf in Sciabar-

ra 1995, 241)

Sciabarra points out that both Leonard Peikoff and Harry Binswanger agree with Gotthelf that “the choice to live is indeed a metaethical commitment. It is a choice that both precedes and underlies the need for morality” (241).

I have called this view “existentialistic,” but perhaps it is more precise to call this the “voluntarist” interpretation of Rand's theory of obligation. Something is obligatory only if we choose it. Does this position make sense? Is it the best way to understand what Rand is contending?

While it is true that nothing can be actually good for human beings apart from their having chosen it, it does not follow from this that our choosing alone makes something good for us. And it certainly seems doubtful that Rand (as well as most proponents of the “voluntarist” view) would ever want to hold that choosing is sufficient to make something good for human beings. Yet, if this is so, then we can legitimately speak of what would be actually good for human beings if they were to choose it. Further, we can contrast this with what would *not* be actually good for human beings if they were to choose it. Having made such a differentiation, however, we come to the fundamental question: Does that which would be actually good for human beings, if they were to choose it, have any claim on our choosing? Does it provide us with a reason for choosing? Does it have any directive power?

The voluntarists contend that apart from the choice to live, there is no implication for our conduct from any fact of nature. There is no fact of nature that by itself has any directive power for human choice. Yet, if this is so, the very legitimacy of speaking of what would be actually *good* for human beings if they were to choose it is placed in doubt. If such putative facts have no directive power for human choice, if they provide no reason for our choosing, then there is no point in speaking of them as “good for.” Indeed, to say that X-ing would be actually good for human beings if they were to choose it is to say that X-ing is *worthy of choice*, and noting that X-ing is choice-worthy is just to say that we *ought* to choose it—everything else being

equal. If choosing to live is logically prior to something being choice-worthy, then we cannot legitimately speak of what would be actually good for human beings if they were to choose it.

In addition, if that which would actually be good for human beings if they were to choose it carries no directive power by itself for human choice, then why is it needed for guidance, as the voluntarists suggest, once we make the choice to live? What does it provide? The supposed answer is, of course, that given the pre-moral choice to live, the nature of human life determines the means for attaining that end. Our choice sets the end, and the nature of life provides the means. In other words, we are to follow the voluntarist hypothetical imperative: If life is our goal, then we ought to adopt the means for its attainment.

But why should the nature of life be deemed capable of guiding our selection of means if no fact of nature can by itself provide such guidance? If something is only choice-worthy because it is chosen, then why does the fact that certain modes of conduct are necessary for human existence provide a reason for adopting such conduct? Why ought we choose the means to our ends? Why ought we follow the voluntarist hypothetical imperative?

If it is replied that our failing to choose the appropriate means entails our not achieving our end, then we return to the initial problem of this essay: Why is achieving our end, living the life that is proper to man, choice-worthy? Why ought we to choose to live? The voluntarists can provide no answer—for this is *ex hypothesi* a pre-moral choice. But if this is so, it follows that they can provide no reason *why* we ought to choose the means to our end either.

Indeed, it is not even clear what it is to say that living is “our end” or “our choice” if the choice-worthiness of life only results from our choice. Choosing to live cannot, for Rand, be simply a random act—something that just happens to come down in favor of life. Choosing must be done for a reason, and thus when one chooses to live, it is because one values life. But where does that value come from? What makes life something choice-worthy if it is not life itself? Without life being something that is choice-worthy, something that we ought to choose, there is really no meaning to the

“choice to live.”

Despite all the paraphrasing of selected statements from Rand, the fundamental problem with the “voluntarist” view does not go away. If the choice to live is a metaethical commitment that precedes and underlies the need for morality, then there is still no reason why one ought to choose to live and thus no reason to be moral. Nothing can be said to a person regarding why he or she ought to choose to live. A person cannot be told that it is wiser, better, more sensible, or more logical to choose to live. It is a choice that is outside of reason.

Furthermore, there is ambiguity in the voluntarist claim that there are no human values without choice. Does this mean merely that human choice is necessary for the achievement of human values, or does this also mean that nothing is in fact valuable for human beings unless they are first committed to living? The first is obvious and true, the latter is neither. There are many things that are good for human beings to choose regardless of whether they choose to live or not.

Finally, there may be a confusion of concept with reality here. It is certainly the case that one cannot have the concept of value without there being some human cognitive agency. Yet, this does not show that there are no realities that are valuable for human beings apart from the exercise of what Rand calls “volitional consciousness.”¹⁵ Human choice is necessary for the achievement of man’s survival qua man, but it is not necessary for it to be the case that such a way of living is our ultimate good and thus something we ought to choose. We do not require any “pre-moral” choice.

Notes

1. The current paper is a revised and extended version of my original address presented on 28 December 1990 at a meeting of the Ayn Rand Society of the American Philosophical Association (Eastern Division), Boston, Massachusetts. For their assistance and suggestions for revision, thanks are owed to Robert L. Campbell, Douglas J. Den Uyl and Chris Matthew Sciabarra.

2. A deontological theory is any theory in normative ethics that holds “duty” and “right” to be basic and defines the morally good in terms of them. Such theories attempt to determine obligations apart from a consideration of what promotes or expresses the human good. For Kantians, this is accomplished primarily by a universalizability test.

3. A consequentialistic theory is any theory in normative ethics that attempts to determine obligations *merely* by whether an action or rule produces the greatest, net expected "good" (or least "bad") consequences.

4. Despite appearances, this is not primarily an argument against suicide. See note 9 below. Further, I will leave for some other occasion a discussion of whether this inconsistency is of a formal or of a performative nature.

5. A contradictory belief is something that must be false, but it is not literally meaningless.

6. For a helpful discussion of the various meanings of "implicit" in Rand, see Campbell 2002.

7. Both a dominant ultimate end (or value) and an inclusive ultimate end (or value) are never sought for the sake of anything else; but the former reduces the value of everything else to that of a mere means, while the latter comprises activities that express the ultimate value in various forms. To better appreciate this distinction, focus on the difference between two relations of subordination to some end: the difference between (a) activities that are purely means or instruments to that end, and (b) activities that are ingredients in or constituents of that end.

For example, consider the relationship of obtaining golf clubs to playing golf, and the relationship of putting to playing golf. While both are "for the sake of" playing golf, the former is only a necessary preliminary, but putting is one of the activities that make golfing what it is. Further, the actions taken to obtain golf clubs produce an outcome separate from the activity—namely, the possession of golf clubs that can be used—while putting has no end or result apart from itself. Its value is not that of a mere means. Its value lies in its being an expression or realization of the activity of which it is a constituent. As J. L. Ackrill (1980, 19) notes: "One does not putt in order to play golf. . . . Putting *is* playing golf (though not all that playing golf is)."

If life is understood as an inclusive ultimate end, then it is an activity whose constituents express the value that is life. Their value is not determined because they are simply means. Furthermore, understanding life as an inclusive ultimate end (or value) has important implications for how one understands the ultimate moral value, "man's survival qua man." One might say, for instance, that such activities as friendship, knowledge, or virtue are valuable not simply because they produce a life that is appropriate to man, but also because they actually express what it is to live in such a manner. Causality is still the principle of determining one's obligations, but it would in this instance be *formal*, not simply, efficient causality.

8. In *The Philosophic Thought of Ayn Rand*, Douglas Den Uyl and I argue that Rand accepts a biologically based natural teleology. See Den Uyl and Rasmussen 1984, especially Chapter 4, "Life, Teleology, and Eudaimonia in the Ethics of Ayn Rand." In *Liberty and Nature*, we note that moral obligations for an ethics based on natural teleology are not hypothetical in the sense that they depend on merely what one wants or chooses. Rather, moral obligations are conditional on attaining one's human good, which is one's natural end. See Rasmussen and Den Uyl 1991.

9. Of course, there can be times in which choosing to die is better, because there might be no chance to live a life proper to a human being. In such a situation, choosing to die would, as odd as it might seem, actually be acting in accordance with the ultimate value of life and would be morally appropriate.

10. Once we awaken from our Cartesian slumbers, we can locate human choice in the middle ground between compulsion and radical freedom. On the one hand, human choice is not reducible to some causal string—the mere result of antecedent genetic or socio-cultural factors. Human beings *are* moral agents, and choosing is the central, necessary element in the achievement of the life that is proper to man. It is the key to making the human good both actual and personal. On the

other hand, human choice is not radically free. It does not create its context and is not some primitive, inexplicable, unconditioned act. It does not create *ex nihilo* either the need for choice or the way of living that constitutes what it is to be a good human being.

Accordingly, human beings can choose not to hold man's survival qua man as their moral standard, but they cannot choose not to be human or not to have the overall potentiality for such a manner of living. Nor can they choose to make the human good anything other than the actualization of this overall potentiality. That is something real, and it is that for the sake of which human choice is exercised. Living the life that is proper to man is the ultimate *telos* of human choice whether or not human beings recognize it or choose it.

11. If Rand rejects a deontological approach to moral obligation, then our obligations must, for her, be conditional on something. For Rand, our obligations are conditional either on a pre-moral choice to live or on the human good. If it is the former, then there is no reason why one ought to make this basic choice. Furthermore, there is no reason for accepting any moral obligations that depend on it. If it is the latter, then the ultimate reason why one ought to do anything is, as many a mother has said, "because it is good for you." Or, as Aquinas said in formulating the *first principle* of practical reasoning: "Good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided" (*Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 94, a. 2).

12. Roderick Long has noted that there are three types of imperatives: "Problematic hypothetical imperative: *If* you seek this end, then you must take the following steps. Assertoric hypothetical imperative: *Since* you seek this end, then you must take the following steps. Categorical imperative: *Regardless* of what ends you seek, you must take the following steps" (Long 2000, 61 n. 65). Long identifies Rand's official position with the problematic imperative, but also notes that there are times Rand talks as if she follows Aristotle and uses the assertoric imperative. Regarding Rand's use of a problematic imperative, Long remarks that "it is difficult to avoid the implication . . . that the choice to live is arbitrary, a groundless, subjective, existentialistic commitment for or against which rationality has nothing to say" (34).

13. Rand's idea is now often expressed in an agent-relative theory of the human good. The human good, G, for a person, P, is agent-relative if and only if its distinctive presence in world W_1 is a basis for P ranking W_1 over W_2 , even though G may not be a basis for *any other* person's ranking W_1 over W_2 . In other words, there is no such thing as the human good—*period*. The human good is always and necessarily the human good for some person or other. See Rasmussen 1999, for a discussion of this distinction and many other related issues. See also Den Uyl 1991.

14. With regard to Gotthelf's point that he no longer accepts all of his own formulations in reply to my original paper, see Sciabarra 1995, 419 n. 31.

15. There may be an important connection between what Rand calls "the choice to think" and "the choice to live," and it may be useful to resolving these difficulties in Rand's thought. Yet, this issue goes beyond our current scope; my stated aim is to simply begin a discussion.

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