

Praxeology: Who Needs It

Roderick T. Long

Ayn Rand's relationship with the Austrian School is complex. The twentieth century's three most prominent Austrians—Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich A. Hayek, and Murray Rothbard—all spoke favorably of her work.¹ With Hayek and Rothbard, Rand did not return the favor, regarding them rather as “enemies”—Hayek for his compromises with statism, and Rothbard for his anarchism.² But she was much more enthusiastic about Mises, vigorously promoting his works³ and giving her *imprimatur* to rave reviews, in her periodicals *The Objectivist Newsletter* and *The Objectivist*, of Mises's books *Human Action*, *Planned Chaos*, *Planning for Freedom*, *Omnipotent Government*, and *The Anti-Capitalistic Mentality*. She also specifically endorsed many of Mises's distinctive ideas, from his argument against the possibility of economic calculation under socialism (letter to John Hospers, 27 November 1960, in Rand 1995b, 515) to (a version of) his theory of the business cycle (“Egalitarianism and Inflation,” in Rand [1982] 1985), and described her ideal curriculum as “Aristotle in philosophy, von Mises in economics, Montessori in education, Hugo in literature” (Rand [1982] 1985, 81).⁴

Yet in her marginal comments on *Human Action*⁵ (Rand 1995a, 105–41), she severely condemned Mises for, *inter alia*, his aprioristic epistemology and value-subjectivism; and she once described the Austrian School as “one of the many approaches to capitalism which I oppose,” though adding “I do agree with many of its purely economic ideas” (letter to W. H. Hutt, 28 August 1966, in Rand 1995b, 642). Her disagreements with Mises, then, were mainly philosophical rather than economic. This is confirmed by Nathaniel

Branden's *Objectivist Newsletter* review of *Human Action*, approved by Rand, which praised the book as a "major economic classic," "eminently deserving of careful study," but added:

In justice to Professor Mises' position and our own, it must be mentioned that there are many sections of *Human Action* with which Objectivists cannot agree. These sections pertain, not to the sphere of economics as such, but to the philosophical framework in which his economic theories are presented. We must take the gravest exception, for example, to the general doctrine of praxeology; to the assertion that all value-judgments are outside the province of reason, that a scientific ethics is impossible; to the disavowal of the concept of inalienable rights; and to many of the psychological views expressed. (Branden 1963b, 34)

What were Rand's grounds for taking "gravest exception" to Mises's "general doctrine of praxeology"?⁶ Judging from Rand's *Human Action* marginalia, chief among them was praxeology's status as an *a priori* science of human action. "There is no 'a priori' knowledge," Rand insisted in the margins; "[t]here is no knowledge not derived from experience" (Rand 1995a, 113–14). She also objected to praxeology as "a new science whose boundaries one cannot define," which "invades the field of philosophy" and poses as a "substitute for morality" (133–34).

The other caveats listed in Branden's review concern the specific *content* of praxeology. Rand's disagreements with Mises over the status of "value-judgments," a "scientific ethics," and "inalienable rights" all reduce to their disagreements over value-subjectivism. As for Mises's objectionable "psychological views," the marginalia indicate that these probably include a) the doctrine that the "incentive that impels a man to act is always some uneasiness" (Rand [1995a, 108, 122] calls this "Nirvana-worship," where "happiness is the absence of desire," and adds that Mises's assumption of the *disutility of labor* forbids "any possible agreement with praxeology"); b) the claim that all action is rational (Rand denies that the thought pro-

cesses of primitive and of psychotic persons are rational, and indeed maintains that “[m]ost men do *not* use reason about their means” [111, 115, 123]); and c) Mises’s determinism (for Rand, it is nonsense to speak of “the *choices* of a being who has no *free will*” [117]).⁷

I shall argue that there are ways of answering these interconnected objections to Misesian praxeology that not only vindicate praxeology—and liberate it from Mises’s sometimes misleading terminology (which I think sometimes misled even Mises himself)—but also show it to be far more congenial to Rand’s philosophy than she suspected.

The *A Priori*

Consider first Rand’s rejection of Mises’s apriorism. Admittedly, Mises tended to describe his apriorism in Kantian terms, as the imposition of innate categories on inputs from an unknowable reality; but there is nothing in the notion of the *a priori* that requires such an interpretation. There are two forms of reasoning generally called *a priori* that Rand herself could accept (if not under that label). One form of Rand-compatible *a priori* reasoning is validation of propositions by showing that they are, or follow from, *conceptual truths*. As Gregory Browne has shown in his recent book *Necessary Factual Truth*, there is a sense in which Objectivist epistemology can countenance the existence of conceptual truths. Browne distinguishes between “Deep Kinds,” whose membership is specified as sameness in kind with members of a paradigm set, and “Shallow Kinds,” whose membership is “specified by giving a list of the essential attributes, and including in the kind all and only beings that have the essential attributes” (Browne 2001, 178). In short, the membership of Shallow Kinds, unlike that of Deep Kinds, is determined solely by the attributes listed in their definitions. While Rand argued persuasively that not all kinds are shallow, Browne makes a good case for the claim that *some* are, and that the existence of Shallow Kinds is compatible with Rand’s semantic theory.⁸

For example, Browne denies that Shallow-Kind propositions are “analytic” in the sense of being “true by convention.” While in the

case of Shallow Kinds (unlike Deep Kinds) “our choice of what attributes to put into our concept, definition, intension, and essence is arbitrary or pragmatic,” nevertheless once that choice *has* been made, then “the reference is determined, and so the choice of what to consider a referent is either correct or incorrect”⁹ (287–88).

Interestingly, Leonard Peikoff introduces the Objectivist critique of “analytic truths” in the context of a *praxeological* truth. Peikoff tells how, in response to his claim that since “monopolies are caused by government intervention in the economy” they are “logically impossible under capitalism” (a more Rothbardian than Misesian bit of praxeological analysis),¹⁰ an acquaintance had objected that Peikoff’s claim was simply a matter of “arbitrary fiat,” being “*logically* true but not *factually* true”—since “no matter what proportion of the market it controls,” Peikoff would presumably refuse to “call a business a ‘coercive monopoly’ if it occurs in a system [Peikoff] call[ed] ‘capitalism’” (Peikoff [1967] 1990, 88). On Browne’s analysis, if “monopoly” and “capitalism” are Shallow-Kind terms, then their relation to the properties they pick out is in a sense the product of “arbitrary fiat”; but *given* what these terms mean, then it will be a genuine truth about the world—and so “factually true”—that monopolies cannot occur under capitalism.

If, as Browne himself suggests, the terms used in economics (e.g., cost, price, money, rent) generally refer to Shallow Kinds, then there will indeed be a body of economic truths that can be validated simply by an inspection of the relevant concepts—which is just what Mises was claiming. Such validation would be *a priori* as most philosophers use that term, but it would not be *a priori* in the way to which Rand objects, since it represents a rearrangement of empirically known properties rather than an insight into some mystical realm.

After all, Rand ([1966] 1986, 19) herself defines “capitalism” as “*a social system based on the recognition of individual rights, including property rights, in which all property is privately owned.*” Obviously this definition was not arrived at by investigating the properties of some paradigm instance, since capitalism, *as Rand defines it*, has never existed on this planet; rather it is a Shallow Kind in Browne’s sense, and everything Rand says about “capitalism” is thus an exercise in innocently *a priori*

reasoning.¹¹

The other form of reasoning that most philosophers would likewise call *a priori* is one that Rand herself accepts—namely, the validation of *axioms* by showing them to be presupposed in their very denials. As Rand ([1966–67] 1990, 59) observes, “there is a way to ascertain whether a given concept is axiomatic or not: one ascertains it by observing the fact that an axiomatic concept cannot be escaped, that it is implicit in all knowledge, that it has to be accepted and used even in the process of any attempt to deny it.” But this is precisely Mises’s conception of the *a priori*; when we “qualify a concept or a proposition as *a priori*,” he tells us, we mean that “this *a priori* concept or proposition is necessarily implied in our mental approach to all the problems concerned, i.e., in our thinking and acting concerning these problems” (Mises 2002, 18).

Rothbard ([1976] 1997a, 68) expands on Mises’s point in a way that Rand should certainly find congenial:

The action axiom, in particular, should be, according to Aristotelian philosophy, unchallengeable and self-evident since the critic who attempts to refute it finds that he must use it in the process of alleged refutation. Thus, the axiom of the existence of human consciousness is demonstrated as being self-evident by the fact that the very act of denying the existence of consciousness must itself be performed by a conscious being. . . . A similar self-contradiction faces the man who attempts to refute the axiom of human action. For in doing so, he is ipso facto a person making a conscious choice of means in attempting to arrive at an adopted end: in this case the goal, or end, of trying to refute the axiom of action. He employs action in trying to refute the notion of action.

Thus, given what Mises means by “*a priori*,” Rand is as much an apriorist as he is!

Now Rand ([1966–67] 1990, 55) would resist calling our knowledge of axioms *a priori*, on the grounds that, for her, axioms

identify facts that are ultimately grasped via perceptual experience, and so do not count as prior to such experience. Here Mises (2002, 18) would disagree; for him, since axioms are “precisely the instrument that enables us to distinguish what is true or valid from what is not,” it makes no sense to think of them as resting on experience. This is an important philosophical disagreement between Mises and Rand;¹² but while Mises and Rand differ as to the precise epistemic status of axiomatic knowledge, they do both acknowledge the existence of such knowledge, and so there is nothing in principle to prevent Rand from embracing a body of axiomatic truths about human action.¹³ Rothbard ([1976] 1997a, 63–64) in fact shows how it is possible to embrace the principles of praxeology on just such a basis:

Ludwig von Mises, as an adherent of Kantian epistemology, asserted that the concept of action is a priori to all experience, because it is, like the law of cause and effect, part of “the essential and necessary character of the logical structure of the human mind.” Without delving too deeply into the murky waters of epistemology, I would deny, as an Aristotelian and neo-Thomist, any such alleged “laws of logical structure” that the human mind necessarily imposes on the chaotic structure of reality. Instead, I would call all such laws “laws of reality,” which the mind apprehends from investigating and collating the facts of the real world. My view is that the fundamental axiom and subsidiary axioms are derived from the experience of reality and are therefore in the broadest sense empirical.¹⁴

Rothbard nevertheless calls such axioms *a priori* because they are prior to “the complex historical events to which modern empiricism confines the concept of ‘experience’” (65).

This is the sort of “apriorism” to which Rand should have no objection; thus her chief objection to praxeology collapses. And her other objections fall with it: once one admits apriorism, then praxeology is no longer a “science whose boundaries one cannot

define”; instead it is defined by its method. Praxeology is the study of those features of human action that can be grasped *a priori*.¹⁵ Praxeology “invades the field of philosophy” because it is in fact a branch of philosophy, and specifically of metaphysics. It is not a “substitute for morality” because it is concerned merely with identifying the principles that govern human action and not with evaluating such actions—though of course praxeological considerations will have to inform that branch of philosophy that *is* concerned with evaluation, namely ethics.

Subjective Value

Mises is a value-subjectivist in two distinct senses. First, he is a subjectivist about the *explanation* of action, in the sense of holding that in explaining a human action we must appeal, not to the agent’s actual situation, but to the situation *as the agent understood it*, and thus to the agent’s beliefs (be they true or false) and desires (be they creditable or discreditable). Thus far, while Rand might resist the *term* “subjectivism” here, she need have no quarrel with the substance of Mises’s doctrine.¹⁶

But Mises also holds, and apparently takes explanatory subjectivism to imply, a second sort of subjectivism—not about the *explanation* of action but about its *justification*. There are, to be sure, objective facts about which means are best suited for achieving certain ends; but, insists Mises, there are no objective facts about which *ultimate* ends are appropriate to pursue. “Value is not intrinsic. It is not in things and conditions but in the valuing subject” (Mises [1957] 1985b, 23). “It is within us; it is the way in which man reacts to the conditions of his environment” (Mises [1949] 1966, 96).

Here Rand (1995a, 131) objects, naturally enough, that Mises “offers us the old choice between ‘intrinsic’ and ‘subjective.’” Rand defines *intrinsic* value as value that “resides in some sort of reality, independent of man’s consciousness,” and *subjective* value as value that “resides in man’s consciousness, independent of reality.” Against both conceptions she upholds *objective* value, which is “neither an attribute of ‘things in themselves’ nor of man’s emotional states,” but

“an aspect of reality in relation to man,” i.e., “an evaluation of the facts of reality by man’s consciousness according to a rational standard of value” (Rand [1966] 1986, 23).

As Richard Johnsson (2003a; 2003b) and Edward Younkins (2003; 2004a; 2004b) have pointed out, the version of value theory defended by Carl Menger, founder of the Austrian School, points to a way of revising Mises’s value theory in a way that Rand might find acceptable. In his *Principles of Economics*, Menger ([1871] 1994, ch. 1) defines economic goods as items human beings have *learned* how to direct to the satisfaction of human needs. Economic values are thus not *intrinsic* values, since their value depends both on their ability to meet human needs and on human beings’ having learned how to exploit this ability; nor, however, are they *subjective* values, since human beings can be mistaken not only (as Mises would grant) about whether such items in fact promote the satisfaction of such needs, but also (as Mises would not grant) about whether the needs in question are genuine or “imaginary.”¹⁷

Austro-Objectivist George Reisman (2002, 7) describes Menger’s value theory in such a way as to highlight its similarity to Randian “objective value”:

What nature has provided, according to Menger, is the material stuff of the deposits in these mines and wells, but it has not provided *the goods-character of any of them*. Indeed, there was a time when none of them were goods.

The goods-character of natural resources, according to Menger, is *created by man*, when he discovers the properties they possess that render them capable of satisfying human needs and when he gains command over them sufficient to direct them to the satisfaction of human needs.

But Menger says relatively little about the character of “human needs,” and how their status as genuine or imaginary is to be determined. After all, Menger and Mises *agree* that it is an objective matter whether a particular means serves a particular end or not;

where they appear to disagree is on the status of ultimate ends, with Menger taking them (apparently) as biologically given, while Mises takes them as arbitrarily chosen. Here it is not so clear after all that Rand is really closer to Menger than to Mises. Like Menger, Rand does link ultimate value to biology; but she also insists that moral imperatives are hypothetical rather than categorical, and *seems* to regard the ultimate choice (to live) as beyond moral assessment, morality being rather a matter of determining the means to this end. (“Causality vs. Duty,” in Rand [1982] 1985; “The Objectivist Ethics,” in Rand [1964] 1989). Is this really so different from Mises’s position? Of course, Rand would insist that the value of life is a precondition for, and so in some sense presupposed in, all other values, and so enjoys a special status; but Mises similarly thinks that the value of peaceful social cooperation is a precondition for *most* other values (admittedly not all) and so likewise enjoys a special status. As Mises writes:

Morality consists in the regard for the necessary requirements of social existence that must be demanded of each individual member of society. (Mises [1927] 1985a, 33)

The ultimate yardstick of justice is conduciveness to the preservation of social cooperation. Conduct suited to preserve social cooperation is just, conduct detrimental to the preservation of society is unjust. (Mises [1957] 1985b, 54)

Substitute the phrase “man’s life as a rational being” for “social existence” or “social cooperation” in the above sentences, and it will be obvious that Randian and Misesian ethics share a considerable similarity in *structure*, despite a deep disagreement on what the ultimate standard should be.¹⁸ Mises even moderates this disagreement by acknowledging that “rational behaviour, directed solely toward one’s own good, should be called ethical too,” since after all “in the last analysis the hygiene of the individual and social ethics are based on the same reasoning” (Mises [1922] 1981, 408)—though unlike Rand

he appears to define “one’s own good” as mere preference-satisfaction.

The relation between life’s status as a *necessary* value (because the presupposition of all other values) and life’s status as an *optional* value (because the object of a basic choice *upstream* from legitimate moral assessment) is, famously, one of the most vexed points of Rand interpretation;¹⁹ and the precise extent of similarity between Randian and Misesian value theory cannot be determined independently of this question.

This much, however, is clear: Mises and Rand are both ethical *internalists*. That is, they both insist that claims of moral obligation lack all authority except insofar as they appeal to reasons that an agent can recognize from *within* her own value-set. This is what Mises ([1949] 1966, 883) means in saying that according to his “autonomous, rationalistic and voluntaristic ethics,” the role of praxeology is not to assert categorically that “men should peacefully cooperate within the frame of societal bonds,” but merely to point out that “men must act this way *if* they want to make their actions more successful than otherwise.” It is also what Rand means when she contrasts her own hypothetical, final-causation approach to morality with the Kantian categorical approach (“Causality vs. Duty,” in Rand [1982] 1985; *cf.* Kelley 1996).²⁰ And one can see such internalism as derivable *a priori* from praxeological foundations. Praxeologically understood, all action involves the application of *means* to achieve desired *ends*; hence a demand that an agent perform a certain action is literally *unintelligible* unless it appeals to ends that the agent desires (or is committed to desiring, or can be persuaded to desire) and proposes means whose connection to the end the agent recognizes (or is committed to recognizing, or can be persuaded to recognize). On this point, Rand and Mises are in perfect agreement.

Hence the sort of ethical “subjectivism” to which Rand objects is not the sort that follows from praxeology’s explanatory “subjectivism”; and the sort of ethical “subjectivism” that *does* follow from explanatory “subjectivism” is not the sort to which Rand need object.

Motives and Causes

Finally, let's consider the "psychological views" to which Rand and Branden took the "gravest exception." One was Mises's claim that all human action is rational. By this Mises of course did not mean that people always pursue the most rationally defensible ends (for Mises there are no such things) or even that, given their ends, people always choose the most rationally defensible *means* to their ends. In part, what he meant was simply that human action is *purposeful*. But Rand would object even to this claim: one of Rand's marginalia corrects Mises's statement that "men purposely aim at certain ends" to "Some men do" (Rand 1995a, 123). Mises's main point, of course, is that any action must have a means-end structure in order to count as an action at all;²¹ and Rand would surely not disagree with this. The difference, I suspect, is that Mises, as a psychological determinist, thinks that human beings always act according to their best knowledge at that moment, and so choose the most rationally defensible means *of which they are aware*, whereas Rand ([1964] 1989, 22) as a proponent of "volitional consciousness," holds that human beings can freely ignore their present knowledge by going "out of focus."

Mises regards determinism as an *a priori* praxeological truth. The existence of action is axiomatic, but action necessarily involves means and ends, and "[t]he category *means and ends* presupposes the category *cause and effect*" (Mises [1949] 1966, 22). Hence the existence of causality is likewise an *a priori* truth. Mises infers that we live in a "world of regularity" where "everything that happens is the necessary sequel of the preceding state of things" (Mises [1957] 1985b, 74, 77). From Rand's perspective, of course, Mises's chief mistake here lies in equating *causality* with *determinism*.²² Once that equation is denied, praxeology no longer poses a threat to free will. Certainly the mere fact that all actions are *motivated* is not sufficient to establish psychological determinism, since, as Mises recognizes, the motives that determine an agent's actions are *simultaneous constituents* of those actions, not "independent of these acts and preceding them" (Mises [1949] 1966, 102). The fact, stressed by Rand, that we can freely

choose not to pay attention to some of our knowledge and beliefs shows that not all action is rational, *if* by “rational” one means “based on the agent’s best understanding of the situation.” But the very choice not to focus on all the available knowledge nevertheless counts as “rational” in a broader sense, insofar as it in turn is chosen as the best known means to a certain end (say, the end of avoiding the effort and discomfort of facing reality). An agent must thus rely on *some* things she knows, precisely in order to succeed in suppressing her awareness of *other* things she knows.

In a sense, then, it *is* true that agents always act rationally; but the only sense of this claim to which Mises is entitled is that agents always act, not necessarily in a manner appropriate to their situation in *all the ways they actually see it*, or even *in the most justified of the ways they actually see it*, but rather in a manner appropriate to their situation *in the way of actually seeing it that is constitutive of their action*.²³ And this is a claim that Rand has no reason to reject.

Rand’s other chief objection to Mises’s remarks about motivation is his suggestion that all action is motivated by “felt uneasiness.” Perhaps Mises was led to this view via the reflection that action always involves a preference for *altering* the existing situation, and such a preference seems equivalent to *dissatisfaction*. But as Robert Nozick (1997, 120) points out, the goal of an action is not necessarily “preferred to the current situation,” but rather is preferred to “what *would* obtain if the action weren’t done.”²⁴ Hence an action can be performed to *maintain* an existing situation rather than to alter it—and the situation to be maintained can itself be an action or a series of actions—including that “process of self-sustaining and self-generated action” that Rand ([1964] 1989, 16) identifies as the ultimate basis of value. Properly understood, then, praxeology does not imply the preference for inactivity that Rand rightly characterizes as “Nirvana-worship.”

Rothbard, in a decidedly Randian spirit, describes how, in his economic treatise *Man, Economy, and State*, he took care to revise precisely this Misesian doctrine:

The revision purged the original formulation of its definite

philosophical pessimism, of the idea that human beings are constantly in a state of dissatisfaction and that man could only be happy in a state of inactive rest, such as in Paradise. Such a philosophic view is contrary to the natural state of man, which is at its happiest precisely when it is engaged in productive activity. The revised part eliminates the philosophic pessimism from praxeology. (Correspondence quoted in Stromberg 2004, xl)

Accordingly, Rothbard ([1962, 1970] 2004, 43–45) acknowledges the possibility of “satisfaction in the labor itself,” and so grounds the “disutility of labor” not in labor’s being inherently distasteful, but in the fact that “labor always involves the forgoing of *leisure*,” which is also a value—though not, *pace* Mises, the ultimate value. The fact that leisure has value for us explains why we prefer to economize on labor, thus allowing Rothbard to draw all the essential conclusions for which Mises thought he needed the mistaken Nirvana premise.

I have argued that the features of Misesian praxeology that Rand found most objectionable—its aprioristic methodology, its value-subjectivism, and its claims about motivational psychology—can be reinterpreted in ways that make them congenial to Rand’s philosophical principles while still preserving the essential points that Mises was seeking to make. Hence there is no reason for those of a Randian philosophical bent to deprive themselves of the powerful methodological instrument developed by Mises and his fellow Austrians: praxeology, the *a priori* science of human action.

Notes

1. Hayek called Rand “one of three outstanding woman economists” (Ebenstein 2001, 275), though she was not an economist; with similar Viennese logic, Mises called her “the most courageous man in America” (B. Branden 1986, 189; N. Branden 1999, 116). Mises also praised *Atlas Shrugged* for its “masterful construction of the plot” and “cogent analysis of the evils that plague our society” (letter to Ayn Rand, 23 January 1958, Mises Archives, Ludwig von Mises Institute; available online at: <www.mises.org/etexts/misesatlas.pdf>), while Rothbard for his part called *Atlas* “the greatest novel ever written” (letter to Ayn Rand, 3 October 1957, quoted in Raimondo 2000, 118; cf. Rothbard 1957, 312–13). Hayek reportedly regarded *Atlas* as a “very good, even profound, book,” but “couldn’t make heads or tails” of her nonfiction writings (Sciabarra 2000, 123 n. 82). Rothbard was later sharply critical of

Rand, but more for her domineering personal style than for her basic philosophical approach, with which he was broadly sympathetic (as his 1979 and [1982] 2002 show).

2. “As an example of our most pernicious enemy, I would name Hayek. That one is real poison” (letter to Rose Wilder Lane, 21 August 1946, in Rand 1995b, 308).

“Please tell your daughter that I am profoundly opposed to today’s so-called libertarian movement and to the theories of Dr. Murray Rothbard. So-called libertarians are my avowed enemies” (letter to Mrs. William Maethner, 20 June 1974, in Rand 1995b, 664).

3. “[B]eginning in the late fifties and continuing for more than ten years, Ayn began a concerted campaign to have his work read and appreciated: she published reviews, she cited him in articles and in public speeches [and] recommended him to admirers of her philosophy. A number of economists have said that it was largely as a result of Ayn’s efforts that the work of Von Mises began to reach its potential audience” (Branden 1986, 188n.). Another Austrian of whose works Rand wrote largely favorably was Henry Hazlitt.

4. See Sciabarra 2000 (114–39, 268–307, 363–83) for a discussion of how Rand and the major Austrian theorists fit into a common tradition of “dialectical libertarianism.” I regard the contributions of Rand, Mises, Hayek, and Rothbard as alike crucial to any systematic understanding of social phenomena; but for present purposes I shall focus on the first two.

5. On the subject of these marginalia, Nathaniel Branden recalls how, since Rand always seemed “friendly, respectful, and admiring” toward Mises, and indeed “almost girlish in the way she complimented him on his momentous achievements,” he was surprised to discover, in looking at her copy of *Human Action*, that the margins were “filled with abusive comments”; the “savagery of her attacks” seemed excessive. When Branden asked Rand if she really thought of Mises as a “bastard,” she replied, “As a total person, no. . . . But if I focus on that aspect of him, where he goes irrational, yes. . . .” (Branden 1999, 116).

6. Anyone familiar with the history of the Objectivist movement will understand why I infer that any judgments expressed by Branden in the pages of *The Objectivist Newsletter* must have been Rand’s also.

7. Rand (1995a, 129) also objects to Mises’s claim that values cannot be measured. Here I think it is clear that there is no fundamental disagreement between Mises and Rand. Mises reserves the term “measurement” for magnitudes that can be cardinally quantified; Rand ([1966–67] 1990, 32–33) agrees with Mises that values cannot be cardinally quantified, but extends the term “measurement” to cover ordinal rankings as well. The difference thus seems mainly terminological.

8. Rand appears to have believed that *no* kinds are shallow. But given Browne’s analysis, it’s hard to know what this could mean. We can certainly classify objects together in any way we find cognitively useful, including classifying them solely by properties mentioned in a definition. Those objects really are out there in the world, and they really have the properties we’re using to group them together—so in what way is the objectivity of such classification impugned?

9. I discuss Browne’s book and its relation to Objectivism in more detail in Long (forthcoming-b).

10. See Rothbard [1962, 1970] 2004, 661–71, 1143–44.

11. See Sciabarra 1995, 283; 2000, 327 n. 23 on Rand’s concept of “government” as similarly ahistorical.

12. For what it’s worth, I think Rand and Mises are each partly right and partly wrong, for reasons I explain in Long (forthcoming-a).

13. Indeed, *free will* arguably counts as just such an axiomatic truth on Rand’s own view: cf. Branden 1963a, 19–20; Branden [1969] 2001, 52–62; Peikoff 1993, 70.

14. On my own view, which is informed by Wittgensteinian considerations, it

is a mistake to think of logic *either* as an innate structure our consciousness imposes on reality *or* as an external constraint to which our consciousness is answerable. (Wittgenstein's rejection of these two options is analogous to Rand's rejection of the subjective/intrinsic dichotomy.) The first option suggests that existence would be illogical, but for consciousness; the second option suggests that consciousness would be illogical, but for existence. Both options invite us to think of logic as a *constraint* on something otherwise illogical. But as Wittgenstein points out: "Logic pervades the world: the limits of the world are also its limits." Hence we cannot coherently describe *what* logic rules out, since "that would appear to presuppose that we were excluding certain possibilities, and this cannot be the case, since it would require that logic should go beyond the limits of the world; for only in that way could it view those limits from the other side as well" (Wittgenstein [1921] 1974, 68; for fuller discussion see Long [forthcoming-a]). Or as Rand herself likewise asks: "is logic considered a restriction? If so—upon *what*? Is there anything conceivable beyond logic?" (journal entry, 9 May 1934 in Rand 1997, 68). Thus, neither the notion of an illogical existence nor the notion of an illogical consciousness makes sense. As Rand would say: *existence is identity, consciousness is identification.*

15. Nor does such apriorism in any obvious way render the learning process *automatic* and *effortless*—one of Rand's objections to Misesian apriorism in Rand 1995a, 120. Mathematics is similarly *a priori*, but hardly automatic or effortless.

16. According to Rand, "the market value of a product does not reflect its *philosophically objective* value," i.e., its value as judged by "the criterion of the most rational mind possessing the greatest knowledge, in a given category, in a given period," but rather "its *socially objective* value," i.e., "the sum of the individual judgments of all the men involved in trade at a given time, the sum of what *they* valued, each in the context of his own life" (Rand [1966] 1986, 24–25). She calls this latter value a form of objectivity rather than subjectivity because, she argues, market incentives tend to reward rational choices and punish irrational ones (25).

17. Describing Menger's achievement, Hayek (1992, 43) portrays a contextual value-objectivism that bears considerable similarity to Rand's approach: "Of course it had often been seen that the decisive factor might be something discoverable not in the object but rather in the relations of men to the object. . . . But this idea was never followed through systematically . . . to the point of realizing that what was relevant was not merely man's relation to a particular thing or class of things but the position of the thing in the whole means-end structure. . . ."

18. Eshelmann (1993) points to another similarity: Mises's version of utilitarianism follows Herbert Spencer in treating moral rules as enduring principles rather than rules of thumb. (For a worry about whether any form of consequentialism, be it Misesian or Randian, can *consistently* do this, see Long 2000 and 2003.) Hayek's account of the role of moral principles in reducing cognitive complexity also has much in common with Rand's (*cf.* Long 2000, 120n.; Long 2001, 412–14). See also Yeager 2001 for a general defense of the essential similarity of Randian egoism and Misesian utilitarianism. (One difference, however, is that the latter, unlike the former, offers us little guidance in choosing among different but equally peaceable modes of conduct.)

19. *Cf.* Peikoff 1993, 245–46; Campbell 2002; Rasmussen 2002. In the end, I do not think Rand succeeds in maintaining a consistent view; see Long 2000.

20. Ironically, Kant himself is likewise an internalist of sorts, and insists that the requirements of morality must be commitments already implicit within our own wills; Rand's depiction of Kantian duties as inexplicable demands impinging on the agent from an *external* authority is a serious misunderstanding (*cf.* Long 2003, 95).

Peikoff 1971 rightly ascribes to Kant the view that our *ability* to act morally depends on an aspect of the will that transcends what is knowable to human reason,

but mistakenly infers from this that Kant thinks the *content* and *justification* of morality are unknowable to human reason.

21. As Israel Kirzner (1960, 214 n. 29) explains: “The proposition that the notion of purpose implies a constraint that one select the most suitable means for the fulfillment of the purpose is not a proposition *about* that purpose. The proposition as such cannot, for example, be ‘explained’ . . . by the postulation of a moral urge to fulfil one’s purposes. Rather, the proposition, on the praxeological view, sets forth the nature of purpose itself. The statement that man’s actions are purposeful is thus only another way of saying that man feels constrained to match means to ends.”

22. As Nathaniel Branden explains the Randian view: “The actions possible to an entity are determined by its nature: what a thing can *do*, depends on what it *is*. . . . *Causality* proceeds from identity. . . . The law of causality is a very wide abstraction; per se, it does not specify the *kind* of causal processes that are operative in any particular entity, and it does not imply that the *same* kinds of causal processes are operative in *all* entities. . . . [F]reedom of choice is not a negation of causality, but a category of it, a category that pertains to man. A process of thought is not causeless; it is caused by a man. . . . [I]f one understands the law of causality as a relation between entities and their actions [rather than between earlier and later events], then the problem of ‘reconciling’ volition and causality is seen to be illusory” (Branden [1969] 2001, 57–60). Thus, one can grant Mises his “world of regularity”—an entity’s possible actions are delimited by its identity—while resisting his inference to causal determinism.

23. For further discussion see Long (forthcoming-a).

24. Mises recognizes this in some passages, only to slide into the other mode of expression in other passages.

References

- Branden, Barbara. 1986. *The Passion of Ayn Rand*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday.
- Branden, Nathaniel. 1963a. The contradiction of determinism. *The Objectivist Newsletter* 2, no. 5 (May): 17, 19–20.
- _____. 1963b. Review of Ludwig von Mises’s *Human Action*. *The Objectivist Newsletter* 2, no. 9 (September): 34.
- _____. 1999. *My Years with Ayn Rand*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- _____. [1969] 2001. *The Psychology of Self-Esteem*. Revised edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Browne, Gregory M. 2001. *Necessary Factual Truth*. Lanham, Maryland/Oxford: University Press of America.
- Campbell, Robert L. 2002. Goals, values, and the implicit: Explorations in psychological ontology. *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* 3, no. 2 (Spring): 289–327.
- Ebenstein, Alan. 2001. *Friedrich Hayek: A Biography*. New York: Palgrave.
- Eshelmann, Larry J. 1993. Ludwig von Mises on principle. *Review of Austrian Economics* 6, no. 2, 3–41. Also available online at: <http://www.mises.org/journals/rae/pdf/rae6_2_1.pdf>.
- Hayek, F. A. 1992. *The Fortunes of Liberalism: Essays on Austrian Economics and the Ideal of Freedom*. Edited by Peter G. Klein. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Johnsson, Richard C. B. 2003a. “Austrian” subjectivism vs. Objectivism, part I. *The Free Radical* 55 (March–April 2003): 26–29.
- _____. 2003b. “Austrian” subjectivism vs. Objectivism, part II. *The Free Radical* 56 (May–June 2003): 24–26.
- Kelley, David. 1996. “I don’t have to.” *IOS Journal* (1 April). Also available online

- at: <http://www.ios.org/articles/dkelley_i-dont-have-to.asp>.
- Kirzner, Israel. 1960. *The Economic Point of View: An Essay on the History of Economic Thought*. Princeton: Van Nostrand.
- Long, Roderick T. 2000. *Reason and Value: Aristotle versus Rand*. Poughkeepsie, New York: The Objectivist Center.
- _____. 2001. The benefits and hazards of dialectical libertarianism. *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* 2, no. 2 (Spring): 395–448.
- _____. 2003. Review of Leland Yeager's *Ethics As Social Science*. *Quarterly Journal of Austrian Economics* 6, no. 1 (Spring): 89–98. Also available online at: <http://www.mises.org/journals/qjae/pdf/qjae6_1_7.pdf>.
- _____. forthcoming-a. *Wittgenstein, Austrian Economics, and the Logic of Action: Praxeological Investigations*. London: Routledge.
- _____. forthcoming-b. Reference and necessity: A Rand-Kripke synthesis? *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* 7, no. 1 (Fall 2005).
- Menger, Carl. [1871] 1994. *Principles of Economics*. Translated by James Dingwall and Bert F. Hoselitz. Grove City, Pennsylvania: Libertarian Press
- Mises, Ludwig von. [1949] 1966. *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics*. 3rd revised edition. Chicago: Henry Regnery. Also available online at: <<http://www.mises.org/humanaction.asp>>.
- _____. [1922] 1981. *Socialism: An Economic and Sociological Analysis*. Translated by J. Kahane. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund.
- _____. [1927] 1985a. *Liberalism: In the Classical Tradition*. Translated by Ralph Raico. Irvington-on-Hudson, New York: Foundation for Economic Education. Also available online at: <<http://www.mises.org/liberal.asp>>.
- _____. [1957] 1985b. *Theory and History: An Interpretation of Social and Economic Evolution*. Auburn, Alabama: Ludwig von Mises Institute. Also available online at: <<http://www.mises.org/th.asp>>.
- _____. [1962] 2002. *The Ultimate Foundation of Economic Science: An Essay on Method*. Irvington-on-Hudson, New York: Foundation for Economic Education. Also available online at: <<http://www.mises.org/ufofes.asp>>.
- Nozick, Robert. 1997. *Socratic Puzzles*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Peikoff, Leonard. 1971. Kant and self-sacrifice. *The Objectivist* 10, no. 9 (September): 1092–1104.
- _____. [1967] 1990. The analytic-synthetic dichotomy. In Rand [1966–67] 1990: 88–121.
- _____. 1993. *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand*. New York: Plume.
- Raimondo, Justin. 2000. *An Enemy of the State: The Life of Murray N. Rothbard*. Amherst, New York: Prometheus.
- Rand, Ayn. [1982] 1985. *Philosophy: Who Needs It*. New York: New American Library.
- _____. [1966] 1986. *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*. New York: New American Library.
- _____. [1964] 1989. *The Virtue of Selfishness: A New Concept of Egoism*. New York: New American Library.
- _____. [1966–67] 1990. *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*. Expanded 2nd edition. Edited by Harry Binswanger and Leonard Peikoff. New York: Meridian.
- _____. 1995a. *Ayn Rand's Marginalia: Her Critical Comments on the Writings of Over 20 Authors*. Edited by Robert Mayhew. New Milford, Connecticut: Second Renaissance.
- _____. 1995b. *Letters of Ayn Rand*. Edited by Michael S. Berliner. New York: Plume.
- _____. 1997. *Journals of Ayn Rand*. Edited by David Harriman. New York: Dutton.
- Rasmussen, Douglas B. 2002. Rand on obligation and value. *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* 4, no. 1 (Fall): 69–86.

- Reisman, George. 2002. Environmentalism in the light of Menger and Mises. *Quarterly Journal of Austrian Economics* 5, no. 2 (Summer), 3–15. Also available online at: <http://www.mises.org/journals/qjae/pdf/qjae5_2_1.pdf>.
- Rothbard, Murray N. 1957. Communications: *Atlas Shrugged*. *Commonweal* (20 December): 312–13.
- _____. 1979. *Individualism and the Philosophy of the Social Sciences*. Cato Paper 4. San Francisco: Cato Institute.
- _____. [1976] 1997a. Praxeology: The methodology of Austrian economics. In Rothbard 1997b, 58–77. Also available online at: <<http://www.mises.org/rothbard/praxeology.pdf>>.
- _____. 1997b. *The Logic of Action I: Method, Money, and the Austrian School*. Cheltenham, United Kingdom: Edward Elgar.
- _____. [1982] 2002. *The Ethics of Liberty*. 2nd edition. New York: New York University Press.
- _____. [1962, 1970] 2004. *Man, Economy, and State: A Treatise on Economic Principles; with Power and Market: Government and the Economy*. *Scholar's Edition*. Auburn, Alabama: Ludwig von Mises Institute. Also available online at: <<http://www.mises.org/rothbard/mes.asp>>.
- Sciabarra, Chris Matthew. 2000. *Total Freedom: Toward a Dialectical Libertarianism*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Stromberg, Joseph. 2004. Introduction to *Man, Economy, and State with Power and Market*. In Rothbard [1962, 1970] 2004, xix–lxxxviii.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. [1921] 1974. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Translated by David F. Pears and Brian F. McGuinness. London: Routledge.
- Yeager, Leland B. 2001. *Ethics as Social Science: The Moral Philosophy of Social Cooperation*. Cheltenham, United Kingdom/Northampton, Massachusetts: Edward Elgar.
- Younkins, Edward W. 2003. Austrian economics can be compatible with Objectivist ethics. *Québécois Libre* 129 (27 September). Available online at: <<http://www.quebecoislibre.org/030927-2.htm>>.
- _____. 2004a. Carl Menger's economics of well-being: Almost Objectivism. *SOLO-HQ* (20 January 2004). Online at: <http://www.solohq.com/Articles/Author_80.shtml>.
- _____. 2004b. Can the ideas of Mises and Rand be reconciled? *SOLO-HQ* (3 February 2004). Online at: <http://www.solohq.com/Articles/Author_80.shtml>.