**Ontology / Psychology**

# Self-as-Organism and Sense of Self: Toward a Differential Conception

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> [The validity of man's conceptual knowledge] depends on the precision of his concepts, which require as strict a precision of meaning (i.e., as strict a knowledge of what specific referents they subsume) as the definitions of mathematical terms. (Rand [1966–67] 1990, 65)

What is the self? Answering this question means working to grasp, in a basic way, our nature as human beings.

All of us have an intuitive notion of "self"—indeed, we use the concept every day. Rand went so far as to consider the concept "self" implicit in every state of consciousness, and thus to designate it as axiomatic (252).

But to what, precisely, does the concept refer?

Historically, the referent of "self" has been a matter of debate and confusion. Rand equated self with mind ([1982] 1984, 50)—a philosophic stroke with which I will take issue in this essay. Other thinkers have declared self to be synonymous with conscious awareness (Perlis 1999, 131). One clever thinker describes self as "a semiotic process" (Pickering 1999, 63), while another describes it as a "center of narrative gravity" (Dennett [1991] 1992, 429). Still others have famously denied that a self exists at all.[1]

Given the centrality of the concept, both in our daily lives and in the specialized work of psychologists, clarifying the precise referent of "self" can yield valuable fruit. Specifically, formulating a clear and coherent concept of self facilitates clarity of self-understanding and creates a sound philosophic framework for higher-level philosophic inquiry, psychological research, and psychotherapeutic practice.

In this essay, I will propose that the self—in an objective

*The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* 9, no. 1 (Fall 2007): 93–111.

conceptual schema—is most usefully conceived as identical with the total organism,[2] and not, as Rand proposed, with the mind. I will also discuss the importance of clearly differentiating the self from the sense of self, the practical benefits of an organismic understanding of self, the nature of the sense of self and the self-concept, and the nature of a false sense of self and its psychodynamic relationship to self-esteem.

## Common Usage of "Self"

Given that individuals already use the concept "self" on a regular basis, let us begin with a brief analysis of that usage, by examining the common meaning of "self" as it appears most frequently in our day-to-day language, that is, within the reflexive pronouns (e.g., "my*self*," "your*self*," "her*self*").

It is not difficult to demonstrate that when individuals use the concept "self" in this context, they generally refer to the whole organism, from the reflexive point of view. Consider the following examples:

- I am exerting my*self*.
- Give your*self* a hot bath.
- Sally can help her*self* to some peanuts.

If we understand the self as the organism—taking for granted that the concept "organism" refers not merely to the physical body, but to the whole human being, body and accompanying consciousness—such an understanding squares gracefully with the way individuals commonly use the concept "self" in the context of reflexive pronouns. When I exert my*self*, I exert the entire organism that is Andrew. When you give your*self* a hot bath, your entire organism participates in the endeavor. When Sally helps her*self* to some peanuts, it is the entire organism that is Sally who enjoys and metabolizes said peanuts.

If, on the other hand, we attempt to understand "self" in this context as conscious awareness, or as "a semiotic process," we find ourselves in a more difficult situation. I, for one, have never witnessed conscious awareness taking a bath, or a semiotic process eating peanuts.[3]

Rand's description of the self is equally problematic in the context of reflexive pronouns. She writes: "A man's self is his mind—the faculty that perceives reality, forms judgments, chooses values" ([1982] 1984, 50).[4]

If one attempts to square Rand's equation of self and mind with the common usage of "self" within the reflexive pronouns, an issue similar to the one already encountered arises: A mind per se can no more easily take a bath or eat peanuts than the other candidates for the referent of "self."[5]

And yet, there is a more significant problem in Rand's equation of self and mind: namely, this equation does not square gracefully with Rand's *own* concept of rational *self*-interest. What does it mean to live for one's self? In Rand's framework, it surely does not mean to live *for one's mind*; rather, it means to live for the *whole organism* that one is: one's mind and body as an integrated totality.[6,7]

## Differentiating *Self* from *Sense of Self*

When we use the concept "self" in the context of reflexive pronouns and other compound words, it is easy to grasp that its implied referent is the organism, from the reflexive point of view.

However, when we use the concept "self" in isolation—when we think *about* the self, describe the self, attempt to grasp what the self is —many among us fail to differentiate the *self* from the *sense of self*.[8]

When I ask acquaintances to describe the self, many associate it with the internal *feeling* of "me" or "I-ness." Descriptions such as the following abound: "The self is my experience of awareness, my experience of being me; it is my experience of being alive and of being a particular person."

The conflation of self and sense of self is widespread and easy to observe. A cursory Google search for "What is the Self?" yields, as its first result, this definition of "self" (from Worldnet.princeton.edu): the self is "your consciousness of your own identity." Psychologists who deal with the issue of self are emphatically no exception to the trend of failing to make any distinction between *self* and *sense of self*. Open practically any book written by a psychotherapist, and you will find the concepts "self" and "sense of self" used interchangeably.[9]

Why have most of us not yet learned to differentiate the self from the sense of self?

One stumbling block is a persistent conception in our culture: the notion of an immortal soul. If you think this notion is culturally passé, consider a recent *Newsweek* poll, which found—with a margin of error of plus/minus four percentage points—that eighty-five percent of Americans continue to believe that after death, the soul "goes to heaven or hell," "lives on in some kind of spiritual realm," or "is reincarnated into another creature" (Adler 2005, 49).

Given the power and persistence of the immortal-soul notion in our culture, I would propose that the concept of self, when used as an isolated concept, tends to function for many people as a descendent of the more ancient concept of the immortal soul. The self from this outmoded vantage point is viewed (and tends to be experienced) as a "ghost in the machine," so to speak, coherent as an entity in its own right and ontologically independent of bodily and environmental processes.

Both the notion of an immortal soul and its likely descendent, the notion of an immaterial, ontologically independent "self," are dubious in nature. Philosophically, discarding the notion of "self" as an immaterial, ontologically independent phenomenon is a corollary of discarding, as Rand did,[10] the Aristotelian notion of metaphysical essences (Rand [1966–67] 1990, 52).[11]

Differentiating the *self* from the *sense of self* allows us to eliminate the notion of the immortal soul, while recognizing and enabling ourselves to study both the reality on which the immortal-soul notion is surely based:[12] the *sense of self—and* the reality of the actual self as a total organism, i.e., an organism that consists of a multi-faceted, multi-layered aggregate of interrelated sensations, thoughts, feelings, emotions, agency, choices, behaviors, body structures and processes, experiences, memories, capacities, etc.[13]

Let us now look at the benefits of integrating an organismic philosophic concept of self into one's cognitive framework.

## Basic Benefits of Understanding the Self as the Organism

The primary benefit of understanding the self as the organism is that this understanding provides an excellent way to encapsulate and integrate into one's thinking and behavior the fact of mind-body coherence.

A human being is a coherent unity of mind and body, yet this way of stating the fact still leaves "mind" and "body" conceptually separate. The concept *organism* conceptually integrates these two facets of human nature in a graceful and unit-economical way. (It does so, I might add, without necessarily implying that mind and body are *indistinguishable* or that we may *collapse* one into the other; it simply implies that, for the human being, the mind and the body function together as a single, integrated, *organized*, system.)

When one objectively views one*self* as identical with the organism one is, one has a mental framework that is likely to augur against two problems:

First, many individuals in this culture disown, to varying degrees, their bodies. Under the sway of various pressures, such as sex-negativity in parental communications and the culture, rationalism in the schools, and traumas both physical and emotional, children and teenagers often repress various aspects of bodily experience from awareness, and erase to varying degrees *physicality* from the sense of self. The results are a loss of physical sensitivity and a corresponding loss of the functional objectivity and sense-basis of the mind (see, for example, Branden [1971] 1978).

Second, many individuals, under the sway of different pressures —such as cultural emotionalism and materialism, disinclination to effort, and lack of spiritual guidance—eliminate to varying degrees intellectuality and spirituality from the sense of self. To the extent of the problem, such individuals become desensitized to their intellectual and spiritual needs, and often slip into a patterned, slumped, materialistic existence, lacking in meaning and spiritual satisfaction.

To the extent I think of my*self* as the *organism* that is me, I tend to more gracefully know myself as a mind-body totality operating within a wider environment; I am more gracefully sensitive to my needs as an entire organism; and I can more gracefully learn to live with full-bodied *integrity*, instead of forgetting, not attending to, or rejecting certain aspects of my human nature. I know more substantively and extensively *who I am*, and can act accordingly.

Further, an organismic understanding of the self undercuts the modern-day tendency to conceptualize and treat medical ailments or symptoms in isolation of their full organismic context. With an organismic understanding of the self, one who is ailing is more likely

to be available to the possibility that one's back pain is related to one's suppression of anger (Sarno 1998), or that one's chronic anxiety or depression is related to one's posture (Marrone 1990, 76–78), or that one's mood swings are related to one's eating or exercise habits (Thayer 2001). Those spiritualistic or rationalistic types who eschew the material world and find themselves unhappy can learn that enjoying more (or better) sex, wearing more attractive clothes, or moving to a more beautiful dwelling may be what is needed to improve the quality of life; those unhappy materialistic types who eschew any solution *other* than a material one (such as more coffee or another pair of shoes) can learn that increased reflection, meditation, or ethical behavior may be the key to improvement.

Practitioners of the healing arts (such as doctors and therapists) can learn to be more attuned to *all* the various facets and levels of the human being, advising their clients in a more fully-informed, less narrow-minded way—and referring out when necessary.[14]

In order to further understand the value of recognizing the self as the organism, it is useful to understand the *self-concept*, the *sense of self*, and, finally, the nature of a *false sense of self*.

## The Self-Concept

Just as an actual cow is distinguishable from the *concept* "cow," the actual self can and should be distinguished from a mental *representation* of self, such as the *self-concept*.

The *self-concept* is the individual's cognitive picture, implicit or explicit, accurate or inaccurate, of his or her own identity—his or her characteristics, traits, capacities, limitations, talents, dispositions, etc. It is an individual's answer to the question: "Who do you think you are?"[15, 16]

There is a significant relationship between one's self-concept and one's behavior: one tends to act in accordance with the potentials suggested by one's self-concept. (See Nathaniel Branden [[1994] 1995, 15], who states: "Self-concept is destiny. Or, more precisely, it tends to be.")

A self-concept can exist at varying degrees of objectivity. To the extent a self-concept is non-objective, as I will describe later, it contributes to the maintenance of a false sense of self, is usually composed of grandiose and/or depressive elements, and limits

behavior in unhealthy ways.

To the extent a self-concept is objective, it creates a supportive context in which an individual can make the most of his or her potentials, without the burden of limiting self-expectations.

## The Sense of Self

For my purposes here, I will describe the sense of self simply as the individual's *experience* of himself *as a coherent being.*

A prolonged discussion of the factors that contribute to a healthy, strong, dynamic and stable sense of self falls outside the range of this essay, but I will briefly indicate that they seem to include the following (highly interrelated) factors, each of which can be a focus of personal growth work and/or psychotherapy:

- attentional strength
- freedom from (unhealed) trauma
- cognitive-motivational integration
- self-esteem
- self-actualization (most importantly in creativity, relationships, and sexuality)

The question of *how* to improve these factors generally falls to the fields of psychotherapy and the various body therapies. But one basic strategy for nurturing a healthy sense of self follows from the understanding of the self as the organism and the differentiation of the self from the sense of self: if one wishes to improve one's sense of self, one can practice *sensing one's self*, i.e., one can *practice self-awareness* —which means, one can practice awareness of all the aspects of the integrated organism one is.

## The False Sense of Self[17]

To the extent aspects of the self are repressed, with pretense or falsehood reigning over accurate self-experience, the sense of self becomes tied to an inaccurate self-concept and self-image, and functions as a *false* sense of self, a self-created *idea* that leaves one out of touch with the actual sensations, feelings, and thoughts occurring within, and out of touch with one's actual capacities, characteristics, strengths, weaknesses, preferences, etc.

Far from a black and white phenomenon, one's sense of self can be marked by various degrees and areas of authenticity versus falseness, and these factors can fluctuate over time. I may operate from a high degree of falseness in some areas and a lower degree in others; I may experience myself and operate more authentically at some times than at other times; I can have moments or periods of pretense and moments or periods of greater authenticity. I can work consciously toward greater and greater self-understanding and authenticity with self and others, or I can allow myself to fall prey to my own ever-expanding, self-created delusions. Some individuals fall on the extreme false side of the continuum (for example, observe many politicians), while other individuals are paragons of authenticity. Obviously, many individuals fall somewhere in between.

To understand the dynamics of the false sense of self, it is useful to first consider psychologist Nathaniel Branden's concept of *pseudo-self-esteem*, for pseudo-self-esteem and a false sense of self are corollaries. Indeed, the ebbs and flows of self-falsification are integrally related to the dynamics of self-esteem.

Branden observed that when actual self-esteem flags, a kind of false self-esteem or pretense at self-esteem can arise in its place; he called this pretended self-esteem *pseudo-self-esteem*. In Branden's words, pseudo-self-esteem is

> the illusion of self-efficacy and self-respect without the reality. It is a nonrational, self-protective device to diminish anxiety and to provide a spurious sense of security—to assuage our need for authentic self-esteem while allowing the real causes of its lack to remain unexamined.
>
> It is based on values unrelated to that which genuine self-efficacy and self-respect require, although sometimes the values are not without merit in their own context. For example, a large house can certainly represent a legitimate value, but it is not an appropriate measure or proof of personal efficacy or virtue. . . . ([1994] 1995, 51–52)

When an individual generates pseudo-self-esteem, he or she also falsifies the self-concept and the sense of self. At the moment a

defensive individual experiences his or her self-esteem as threatened, a wordless, often relatively unconscious internal process occurs, which, if verbalized, would read: "I cannot accept that I am the person I observe myself to be in this moment. I do not *want* to be the person I experience myself to be at this moment. Do I really need to recognize that the highly unpleasant feelings, thoughts or inclinations I am currently experiencing actually exist? That these fears, hurts, or weaknesses actually exist?" Or: "That this rage, destructiveness and sense of impotence actually exist?" Or: "That these strengths, joys and other capacities that frighten or intimidate me actually exist? After all, they are only thoughts and feelings—they're not *really* real. I would prefer not to have these thoughts and feelings. I would prefer to think of myself as having different thoughts and feelings. And why not? I can decide what I will think and feel."[18]

At this moment, the individual's sense of self and mental representation of self become inaccurate. Unpleasant experiences and characteristics are suppressed from the self-sense and erased from the representation, while preferred experiences and characteristics are reified into a deluded sense and inaccurate idea of the self. The individual subsequently operates from this corrupted experience of self, and often works hard to defend it, to the degree of the self-esteem deficit.

In this way, the same conditions that can lead to the lowering of self-esteem and the arising of pseudo-self-esteem—e.g., poor choices, developmental mishaps, harmful parental communications or unrealistic parental expectations, traumas, etc.—can lead to the arising of a false sense of self. Thus, when we observe a false sense of self, in ourselves or others, it is always useful to look for the damaged self-esteem underlying the falsification. Correcting the self-esteem issue is as necessary for personal improvement as is dismantling false self-senses.[19]

It is also useful to note that there are two primary ways in which an individual can falsify his or her sense of self: grandiose falsification and depressive falsification.[20]

Grandiose falsification involves suppressing the awareness of weaknesses from one's sense of self and instituting an overblown sense of one's strengths. Grandiosity generally functions to protect one from feeling vulnerable or afraid. To the extent of the grand-

iosity, one remains unable to grow beyond the fears underlying the grandiosity, because, suffering a self-induced blindness to their actual nature, one remains unable to metabolize these fears and develop the *actual* strengths and abilities that will lead to a greater, more authentic sense of security.[21]

Depressive falsification involves eliminating awareness of strengths from one's sense of self and instituting an overblown sense of one's weaknesses. Depression in this sense of negative self-appraisal (as opposed to depression involving other factors) often is geared to protect one from a certain level of vulnerability or fear, since if one sees oneself as worthless and incompetent, there is no perceived purpose to taking action and risks, and if one is already emotionally downed, one cannot fall from that position and hurt oneself. (Another version of this kind of depression has a grandiose edge: "I am incapable of functioning because the world around me is evil.") Of course, to the extent one suppresses awareness of one's strengths and potentials and focuses exclusively on weaknesses, one remains unable to call upon the kinds of strengths and potentials that might allow one to improve one's situation.

Grandiose and depressive falsifications can occur on small or large scales, and can occur side by side. Sometimes, they can be seen as two sides of the same coin, as for example when an individual's grandiose fantasy collapses and that individual then falls into a depression—or when an individual, sensing an oncoming depression due to a growing negative self-appraisal, adopts a grandiose posture.

If one recognizes that the self is the organism—and that the organism includes a host of changing sensations, feelings, thoughts, actions, bodily forms and processes, as well as a variety of specific potentials, strengths, weaknesses, preferences, capacities, abilities to make choices, etc.—this recognition, along with a willingness to look at the actual self one recognizes oneself to be, can serve to diminish limiting self-notions,[22] in two ways.

First, the recognition of self as organism establishes a framework whereby one is more likely to look at and accept as real all aspects of oneself: physical, emotional, intellectual, behavioral, etc. Some of the observations made in this context will give the lie to stultifying falsifications.

Second, recognizing oneself as an organism tends to undermine

the overblown self-expectations (often inculcated by elders in childhood) that often underlie both grandiose and depressive tendencies, by shifting one's thinking from a moralistic/neurotic context to a *biological* context, where unrealistic expectations can more easily be seen as the extraneous impositions on the actual business of living a life that they are. The depressed or grandiose individual can depart from an overly abstracted, "spectatorial" mode of thought, in which thinking is functionally disconnected from biological conditions, and enter more fully into the play of the life process itself.

## Conclusion

Ayn Rand conveyed in her novels the spiritual glory of material creation and achievement. She explicitly denounced the mind-body dichotomy and dramatized in her fiction heroes who were men and women of both intellect and action. She called her ideological edifice "a philosophy for living on earth" (Rand [1982] 1984, 10). She was as worshipful toward the act of sex as she was toward the reasoning mind. She was, clearly and self-consciously, an integrative thinker.

And yet, it is my observation that followers of Rand's philosophy are, certainly not exclusively, but often enough, overly intellectualized and rationalistic, and with a penchant for moralism and arrogance. In these tendencies, followers of Rand do not diverge entirely from the master's influence; Rand's penchant for moralistic denunciations of those with whom she disagreed manifested frequently in her writing,[23] while her fictional protagonists' tendency toward suppression and harsh judgment of their own pain (Branden 1982) has surely motivated much "Objectivist repression," a phenomenon well noted by orthodox followers of Rand (Peikoff 1983), as well as non-orthodox followers and critics.

It is often supposed that these tendencies are related either to Rand's own personality traits or to misunderstandings or misapplications on the part of her followers.

It is my view, however, that the causal power of philosophy—which Rand ([1982] 1984) recognized so emphatically and enthusiastically in her work—is woefully underappreciated here, and that the tendencies within Randian culture toward intellectualism and moralism are intertwined with a subtle but fundamental "bug in the system," so to speak—a *philosophical* error that reverberated through-

out Rand's work in subtle ways: namely, her identification of self with mind.[24]

My hope is that the treatment of the issue of self presented here will stimulate further thought and discussion of this important matter. Surely, the issue of self lies at the heart of any philosophy that considers itself a practical guide for living. And, indeed, if the advocates of a philosophy of *self*-interest—a philosophy in which the values of conceptual precision and internal consistency also figure prominently—are not entirely clear on what they mean by "self," then it is a philosophy, I might suggest, in need of some repair.

## Notes

1. David Hume ([1739] 1986, 300) and the Buddha (Rahula [1959] 1974, 51) are both well-known proponents of the idea that the self is an illusion, though in their favor it should be noted that the "self" they deny is the "self" as it is traditionally understood—that is, as a stable subjective entity rather than as the integrated organism. I argue elsewhere in this essay that this traditional notion of "self" as a *mental* entity is indeed fatuous, and represents a remnant of the culturally prominent notion of the immortal soul—and that the subjective *experience* of self or the *sense of self*, which is indeed a reality, should be clearly named and clearly differentiated from the actual *self*, which is most profitably viewed as identical with the whole organism.

2. Though I am hesitant to claim innovation on this point, I have yet to discover a philosopher who explicitly advocates conceptually identifying, in a principled way, the self with the organism. The general organismic *understanding* of the human person is by no means novel or innovative, and is often attributed to the humanistic psychologists of the twentieth century. Conceptually, however, the humanists did not consistently differentiate the self from the sense of self. For example, while Carl Rogers proposed the concept of an "organismic self" (Pennington 2003, 210), meant to refer to the totality of one's being, Rogers in general used the isolated term "self" in the traditional fashion, failing to distinguish it from the sense of self, and considering it merely a part of the organism (e.g., Rogers [1961] 1989, 163). Similarly, Gestalt psychologists Perls, Hefferline and Goodman ([1951] 1973, 427), while recognizing the integrated nature of the human organism in general and doing excellent work in this field, *conceptually* described the self at one point as "the system of contacts . . . at the boundary of the organism," and not as the organism per se. Philosopher Ken Wilber ([1979] 2001, 94–125) in his early work characterized the *psychological* identification of self with organism as a positive stage of human development, more advanced and integrative than the identification of self with ego, yet transcended by the identification of self with "witness consciousness," and later with "unity consciousness." (While I question the wisdom of identifying self with consciousness, I would agree that there can be great psychological utility in understanding and experiencing *consciousness* as the witness of one's experience, and even further as without boundary. Of course, the question of whether such modes of understanding consciousness are ontologically sound goes far beyond the scope

of this essay.) What is likely novel, then, in the approach presented in this essay, is the injunction to *explicitly differentiate the self from the sense of self*, in the context of a *consistent conceptual identification of self with organism*, as a crucial key to developing objectivity and clarity in the realms of philosophic/psychological theory and self-understanding.

3. Certainly these phenomena are integrally *involved* in the organism's process of taking a bath or eating peanuts—but it is the *organism* that is the relevant unit here, and just as it is inappropriate to ascribe the property of a part to the whole, as in "the interest of society," it is equally inappropriate to ascribe the property of a whole (e.g., the ability to eat peanuts) to a part (e.g., conscious awareness).

4. An earlier statement of this same basic position can be found in *The Fountainhead*, in which Rand ([1943] 1993, 678) states, "a man's spirit . . . is his self. That entity which is his consciousness." Strong affirmations of the position in subsequent Objectivist literature can be found in Peikoff (1995, v.), who writes that the self, according to Rand, is a man's "mind or conceptual faculty, the faculty of reason" (see also Peikoff [1991] 1993, 255 and 307), and in Smith (2006, 120), who draws extensively from Peikoff on this topic.

5. It is relevant to note that, in harmony with her explicit thrust toward mind-body integration and her opposition to the mind-body dichotomy, Rand's concept of mind or consciousness is indeed, as Sciabarra has pointed out, not a narrow one, "[including] moments of perception, volition, focus, reason, abstraction, and conception" (1995, 166). Sciabarra also notes that "for Rand, reason embodies epistemological and practical activity. This is a reflection of the seamless unity of mind and body" (167). Expansive though Rand's notion of mind may be, however, it is still a notion of *mind*—of an *aspect* or *faculty* of the organism—and not of the organism as a totality.

6. As Rand ([1957] 1992, 947) states (via John Galt) in *Atlas Shrugged*: "You are an indivisible entity of matter and consciousness. Renounce your consciousness and you become a brute. Renounce your body and you become a fake." And, for an explicit rendering of Rand's organismic orientation to ethics, see "The Objectivist Ethics," in which Rand (1964, 6) states: "The standard [of appropriate action in ethics] is the *organism's* life, or: that which is required for the *organism's* survival" (emphasis added).

7. Some readers may argue that the referent of "self" is legitimately context-dependent. (Indeed, some theorists explicitly differentiate two meanings for "self"; see, for example, Campbell, et al. 2002, which distinguishes "being a self" from "having a self.") But to these readers I would pose a respectful question: What purpose is served by identifying the self—in any context—solely with the mind? Psychologically, divorcing bodily aspects of one's organism from one's self-concept is a recipe for repression. And if we accept the legitimacy of the organismic concept of self in at least some contexts, then epistemologically, identifying "self" and "mind" in other contexts—devoid of a *sound epistemological purpose* for doing so—involves both a needless replication of conceptual material and a confusing double-meaning of "self," in violation of "Rand's Razor": "*concepts are not to be multiplied beyond necessity*—the corollary of which is: *nor are they to be integrated in disregard of necessity*" (Rand [1966–67] 1990, 72). *Consistently* and *explicitly* identifying the self with the organism, on the other hand, eliminates a great deal of unnecessary confusion around the

nature of the self, leaving in its place a simple and fruitful clarity.

8. The identification of self and mind is, in my view, a probable manifestation of this error.

9. See, as only one of an abundance of examples, Hamilton 1988. Hamilton notes that "many authors conceptualize the self as a mental representation—that is, an idea, feeling, or fantasy" (10), and states that "self refers to conscious and unconscious mental representations that pertain to one's own person. . . . In this book . . . self always refers to an internal image" (12). Elsewhere in the book, however, Hamilton speaks of the "self-representation" (13, 21, 291). The logic of such a terminological structure suggests that the "self-representation" should be understood as a representation *of a representation* of one's person. Of course, this is absurd, and clearly not the author's intention. In fact, "self" and "self-representation" in this context—as in most works of psychotherapeutic theory—are used interchangeably; when "self" is used as an isolated concept, it is viewed as a representation; when it is used as part of a compound word such as "self-representation," it is implicitly understood as referring to the whole organism.

10. See Rand's *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, where she notes "the radical difference between Aristotle's view of concepts and the Objectivist view[:] . . . Aristotle held that definitions refer to metaphysical *essences*, which exist *in* concretes as a special element or formative power . . . Aristotle regarded 'essence' as metaphysical; Objectivism regards it as *epistemological*. . . . The metaphysical referent of man's concepts is not a special, separate metaphysical essence, but the *total* of the facts of reality he has observed . . ." ([1966–67] 1990, 52).

11. It is relevant to note here that a form of this corollary is arguably a prominent aspect of philosophical Buddhism (as it is commonly espoused), where the concept of metaphysical "emptiness"—which is sometimes translated, more usefully in my view, as "corelessness" or "*essencelessness*"—plays as central a role as the concept of "no-self," where "self" refers to an (illusory) independent and unchanging psychological "core" of a person.

12. Though non-objective and certainly simplistic, the notion of an immortal soul is not entirely arbitrary, and we should not throw out the perceptual baby with the conceptual bathwater. For though the immortal-soul notion may well be unsoundly motivated in many respects by the human desire for immortality, it also has a certain mooring in the perceptual reality of the *sense* of self—a phenomenon that does tend to have, as one of its components, and for most people, a certain feeling of permanence or non-temporality. The question of the nature of this feeling of permanence, and its implications, if any, for how we understand the sense of self and how we understand the universe ontologically, falls outside the range of this essay and outside my current area of expertise. Readers interested in exploring work that has influenced my preliminary thinking on this subject, however, can refer to Wilber [1979] 2001.

13. The integrated nature of the human organism has been well treated and studied over the last century by a variety of psychological, physiological, and psychotherapeutic thinkers and scientists. See, for example, the work of Kurt Goldstein (1939), Wilhelm Reich ([1942] 1973), Moshe Feldenkrais ([1949] 2005 and [1985] 2002), and F. M. Alexander (1932), to name but a few pioneers. Rand herself was a fervent opponent of the "soul-body dichotomy" (1961, 59), the view that mind

and body are inextricably warring opposites. See also Sciabarra 1995 (195–98) for a treatment of both Rand's and Nathaniel Branden's perspectives on mind-body coherence as regards psychological integration.

14. For more about what an integral approach to medicine might look like, see Ken Wilber's forward to *Integral Medicine: A Noetic Reader* (Schlitz et al. 2004). (Wilber, incidentally, who has had contact with Nathaniel Branden and is an admirer of his works, is also not unfamiliar with Rand, and expresses sympathy with at least aspects of her work; see <http://in.integralnaked.org/talk.aspx?id=126>.)

15. See also Branden ([1969] 1979, 200), who describes the self-concept as "a cluster of images and abstract perspectives on [one's] various (real or imagined) traits and characteristics." The work of Jean Piaget on reflecting abstraction is also relevant in this context; see, for example, Robert Campbell's introduction to the English translation of Piaget's *Studies in Reflecting Abstraction* (2001).

16. Another mental representation of self is the self-image—the individual's wordless mental picture of himself, which includes the body image and the individual's image of himself as a social and creative being. It is often found, by body-oriented therapists, to be closely associated with the internal sensory-motor or neuromuscular patterning of an individual, and thus it can be a potent target for dissolving and changing limiting self-notions at the sensory-motor level.

17. The concept of a false sense of self that is erected as a defense against threats to self-esteem (or to the ego more generally) is by no means novel, though the concept, in keeping with the general tendency to conflate the self and the sense of self, more often goes by the term "the false self." Psychologist D. W. Winnicott is sometimes credited as having introduced the term in 1960 (Winnicott [1960] 1965; Hilsenroth et al. 2003, 467); Laing ([1960] 1990, 31, 53, 55, etc.) also employed the term extensively as early as 1960, and Rogers ([1961] 1989, 163) referred to a "false self" as early as 1961. The concept also has precursors in Karen Horney's analysis of the "idealized self" or "pseudoself" ([1950] 1970), in the work of various existentialist philosophers of the 1950s (Laing [1960] 1990, 94, cites Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre, Ludwig Binswanger, and Roland Kuhn), and even earlier in Jung's concept of the "persona" ([1928] 1967, 305), which may well be the primary origin of the concept in psychology. I present a short treatment of the concept here with no pretense of innovation.

18. It should be noted that while such a process of repression or self-deception may often be, on the cognitive level, associated with a subjectivist worldview, it can just as often be associated with a *materialist* worldview, since such a view tends to deny the very existence of feelings and other introspected phenomena, let alone the fact that such phenomena have identity. I also wish to note that, in my own personal and professional experience, repressions or self-deceptions of the kind described here occur on a *continuum* of willfulness, depending both on the level of pain an individual experiences in a given threatening situation, and the level of the individual's skill and strength in maintaining clear consciousness in the face of such pain. The lower the level of pain and the higher the level of skill and strength, the more choice an individual enjoys as to the level of consciousness he or she can bring to painful, self-esteem-threatening experiences. To the extent a painful experience is severe, on the other hand, and to the extent an individual is lacking in skill and strength of consciousness (as is often the case in childhood), repression or a "splitting" of

consciousness can occur in a more or less automatic or physiological way, as the organism's only means of protecting itself from emotional overload and maintaining psychic equilibrium. Such psychic wounds are a form of trauma, and can be treated effectively by various therapeutic means. Given these factors, individuals looking to expand and enhance their self-awareness should be cognizant that in some instances and in certain respects, recognizing errors of choice (or viewpoint) and taking responsibility for correcting them may be necessary, while in other instances and other respects, recognizing the presence of traumatic wounds and treating them with appropriate compassion and therapeutic methods will be necessary.

19. The relationship between the false sense of self and self-esteem presents an important challenge to well-intentioned Buddhists and other spiritual teachers who view "ego" as the primary obstacle to psychological health. In my view, the "ego" to which these teachers refer is often more usefully viewed as a *false sense of self* that arises due to *deficits of self-esteem*; when one understands these dynamics, it becomes clear that an important means of reducing stultifying "ego" is to *grow in actual (as opposed to pseudo-) self-esteem*, which requires, as the work of Nathaniel Branden has so skillfully and sensitively demonstrated, *honoring* the self—the whole, actual self—and its needs (Branden 1983).

20. See also Alice Miller, who considers grandiosity and depression "the two sides of the medal that could be described as the 'false self'" ([1981] 1997, 37).

21. Many theorists and researchers today use the term "narcissism" to refer to what I am describing as grandiosity. For an example of a modern academic treatment of narcissism, see Morf and Rhodewalt 2001.

22. Buddhists, who are known for their equanimity and joyful demeanors, practice in my view a similar insight when they deny the very existence of a self—though the spurious "self" they are referring to is the *traditional* "self," the equivalent of an unchanging, disembodied soul. That said, as a result of their conceptual-blitzkrieg approach to eliminating stultifying senses of self, they tend not to recognize as fully as Western-oriented psychologists that individuals need to accomplish certain challenging developmental tasks if they wish to develop a healthy sense of self (and self-esteem) in the modern world. This failing has been admirably treated by Engler 2003.

23. Readers inclined to deny Rand's tendency to moralistically denounce others in situations where simple disagreement would be more appropriate, might wish to consider a few examples. In speaking of painting, Rand ([1971] 1975, 48) flatly dismissed "the silliness of the dots-and-dashes Impressionists who allegedly intended to paint pure light." In a discussion of literature, she decried the Horror Story as "a genre compared to which Romanticism and Naturalism are clean, civilized, and innocently rational" (112). She found it fitting to denigrate Ralph Waldo Emerson as "a very little mind" ([1982] 1984, 5), and considered Freud so base as to be unworthy of discussion ([1971–76] 1979, 4: 382). Readers familiar with Rand will recognize these examples as typical of her style—and I will leave it to readers who have some familiarity with the thinkers and artistic styles implicated above to judge the level of wisdom in Rand's wholesale denunciations.

24. In this context, it seems relevant to note that, though a proud proponent of mind-body integration, Rand was, by all appearances, ignorant of and uninterested in exploring the intellectual and practical import of the great mind-body innovators

of the twentieth century, such as F. M. Alexander, Wilhelm Reich, Moshe Feldenkrais, Fritz Perls, Ida Rolf and others—valuable allies, in this writer's view, to a humanistic philosophy that preaches self-actualization of both mind and body.

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