

Ayn Rand and “The Objective”: A Closer Look at the Intrinsic-Objective-Subjective Trichotomy

Roger E. Bissell

Not only is objectivity the source of the name Rand chose for her philosophy, but also, as Peikoff (1987, lecture 3) notes, it is “the central guiding norm of epistemology.” As a consequence, observes Kelley (1998, 83), “If we cannot establish the basic objectivity [truth to reality] of our knowledge, then all other conclusions in philosophy are in trouble.” Machan (2004, vi) puts the issue most succinctly: “The key to knowing and living well is objectivity.” There is no denying the great importance of cognitive adherence to reality. For conscious beings, that is how they survive and flourish.

However, there are perceivable gaps in the current understanding and application of the concept of “the objective” by those subscribing to Ayn Rand’s philosophical system, and the existence of these gaps is not merely an academic concern or lexical curiosity.¹ As a result of what appears to be an undue, one-sided emphasis on the epistemic aspect of objectivity, Rand and Peikoff and others seem to have lost sight of much of the clarifying power of Rand’s original distinction (known familiarly as the “trichotomy”) between the intrinsic, objective, and subjective (hereinafter, IOS). Some Objectivists have even gone so far as to not merely downplay, but to ignore or dismiss altogether the ontological aspect of the objective, claiming or implying that the epistemic or methodological side of the objective is all that is important to Objectivism.²

The IOS has a crucially important role to play in helping us to understand not only the typical Objectivist concern—the nature and validity of our various forms of awareness of reality—but also a less-

well-considered issue: the nature of reality as it appears to our various forms of conscious awareness. In other words, the IOS is pregnant with epistemic *as well as* ontological implications that are vital to our understanding of the world in which we think and act. This should become relatively clear, once some care has been taken to accurately portray the IOS in the form in which Rand originally propounded it, and especially to clarify the basic meaning of the “objective” as against previous Objectivist and other usages, as is done in Parts I and II of this essay, respectively.

As a further result, some new directions for further development of the Objectivist philosophy will become apparent. Despite its relatively successful application to such issues as the nature of concepts and the nature of the good, the IOS is not usually marshaled well in attempts to understand other long-standing problems to which it happens to be well suited, such as the nature of propositions and truth, perception, mind and free will, and introspection.

The central purpose of this essay is thus to formulate Rand’s IOS with greater clarity, precision, and depth than has previously been done—and, in so doing, to lead the way to its fruitful application to such philosophical issues, issues that are potentially as important to one’s happiness and well-being as are the issues concerning methodology and thinking style.

In particular, emphasis will be placed in Part III of this essay on the insight that the IOS has valid application to non-volitional phenomena such as sense data—and on the further insight that Objectivists have applied the IOS in a restrictive, one-sided manner not only to epistemology but also, more specifically, to the volitional.³ An attempt will be made to document and explain how Rand’s original model of the trichotomy became so distorted, and it will also be suggested that moving beyond this one-sidedness is a promising first step in solving certain perennial problems in philosophy such as the nature of the mind-body relationship and the free will vs. determinism debate.⁴

Part I: Analyzing and Clarifying the Trichotomy⁵

Rand’s intrinsic-objective-subjective trichotomy (IOS) is an analytical distinction useful for clarifying and properly understanding a number of issues and related theories in philosophy. Rand’s intro-

duction and subsequent development of the IOS arose out of the need to deal with the “havoc [played] with every issue involving the relationship of consciousness to existence” by the false dichotomy of “intrinsic or subjective,” in opposition to which Rand posited the “objective” (1966–67 [1990], 53).^{6,7}

One of the two best developed applications of the IOS (actually, the first appearance of Rand’s trichotomy) pertains to the nature of the good. Rand begins by focusing on the traditional false alternative—typically designated as “objective” and “subjective”—relabeling those two views “intrinsic” and “subjective,” respectively (1965, 21–22).⁸

Specifically, Rand (1965b) notes, one traditional school of thought holds that the good is *intrinsic* to reality, that it “resides in some sort of reality independent of man’s consciousness,” while another holds that the good is *subjective*, that it “resides in man’s consciousness independent of reality.” In contrast to these two erroneous views about the ontological nature of the good, Rand proposes that the good is *objective*: “[T]he good is neither an attribute of ‘things in themselves’ nor of man’s emotional states, but *an evaluation of the facts of reality by man’s consciousness* according to a rational standard of value... [i.e.,] *an aspect of reality in relation to man*” (22; emphasis added).⁹

The other most rigorous application of the IOS, made a scant year or so later (Rand [1966–67] 1990), pertains to the nature of concepts. As Peikoff (1991) notes, Rand recognized, in parallel with the preceding example, that concepts, too, “are *aspects of reality in relation to man*. That is: concepts designate facts—perceived objects with their similarities and differences—as condensed by human consciousness, in accordance with a rational method (logic)” (242; emphasis added). For example, “‘Manness’ . . . is *men*, the real men who exist, past, present, and future; it is men viewed from a certain perspective” (89). And where is a concept such as “Man”? Is it “in reality or in the eye of the beholder”? Neither. Instead, “it is in reality as grasped by the beholder. It designates facts ‘out there,’ as identified and integrated by a human consciousness” (Peikoff 1976, lecture 5).

In contrast with this objective view of concepts, Rand ([1966–67] 1990, 53) extends the parallel with her discussion of the good by again characterizing two erroneous ontological views.¹⁰ Extreme (Platonic)

realism and Moderate (Aristotelian) realism, she says, hold that concepts are *intrinsic*, existing apart from consciousness, while Nominalism and Conceptualism hold that concepts are *subjective*, existing apart from external reality.

It is true that there are additional, specifically epistemic implications of the IOS, and these will be noted shortly. However, to this point, the common thread running through the contrasts Rand drew between the intrinsic, objective, and subjective views of the good and of concepts is not their epistemic nature, but their ontological nature—i.e., not on the “how,” our manner of grasping concepts and the good, but on the “where,” the *location* of concepts and the good.

This highlights something about Rand’s and Peikoff’s descriptions of the objective that is seldom, if ever, noted elsewhere: its dual nature, and specifically the duality of its location. They are asserting that concepts and the good exist in *both* poles of certain kinds of relationships between one’s consciousness and reality. That is, concepts and the good are both *features of reality* (in relation to a conscious human being) and *features of a conscious human being* (in relation to reality).

In other words, there is a large grain of truth in both the intrinsicist and the subjectivist theories that must be acknowledged, if we want to successfully move beyond the one-sided and inaccurate perspectives of the traditional false dichotomies. Correcting the intrinsicist view that concepts and the good reside “in some sort of reality, independent of man’s consciousness,” we must hold instead (with Rand) that concepts and the good reside in *an aspect of reality in relation to man’s consciousness*. And correcting the subjectivist view that concepts and the good reside “in man’s consciousness, independent of reality,” we must hold instead (with Rand) that concepts and the good reside in *man’s consciousness in relation to reality*. To summarize the Objectivist view: concepts and the good are relational; they reside in *both* consciousness *and* existence *at the same time*.¹¹

An objection may be offered that, since the objective is relational—since we must cognitively or evaluatively grasp the relation between reality and a human being in order to grasp a concept or understand the good—concepts and the good can’t be *in* either consciousness or existence, but only *between* them, like the Golden Gate Bridge that connects Marin County and San Francisco.¹² However, it is a fact

that, while the Golden Gate Bridge that connects Marin County and San Francisco admittedly is in neither Marin County nor San Francisco *in isolation*, it is not only *between* but also *in both* of them *at the same time*. Similarly, while the relation of objectivity that connects consciousness and existence exists in neither consciousness nor existence in isolation, it is between *and* in both of them at the same time.¹³

Because of this, *both* consciousness and existence are objective, in distinct but intimately related respects. But it is important to note that what is objective is not the relationship of objectivity between consciousness and existence—i.e., it is not objectivity that is objective—but *consciousness and existence themselves*, because of the relationship of objectivity between them.

In other words, while *objectivity* as a relation between consciousness and existence is the primary, “objective” designates not the relation per se, but the *relational attributes* of both consciousness and existence *that arise or emerge from that relation*, just as “connected to another city by a bridge” designates a relational attribute of both Marin County and San Francisco, arising from the existence of the bridge that exists between them. The relational attribute is in *both of them*, but *only in respect of their relation (via the bridge) to the other*.

Thus, it is actually *because* of the kind of thing that exists between an aspect of reality and man—the rational cognitive or evaluative relation—that a concept or the good is *both* a feature of reality (in relation to a human being) *and* a feature of a human being (in relation to reality). In the very way Rand states it, in two distinctly different, though intimately related, phrases, she is very insistent about this dual-aspect nature of the objective. Again: the objective is *both* an aspect of reality in relation to man *and* an identification or evaluation [by man’s consciousness] of the facts of reality.

Now, by acknowledging that the objective nature of concepts and the good has not only an ontological aspect (the “where” of the objective), but also an epistemic aspect (the “how” of the objective), Rand has shown that her concept of “objective” actually (to continue the metaphor) *bridges* metaphysics and epistemology, in much the same way as the Law of Identity, which is both a law of reality (metaphysics) and a law of thought (epistemology). Concepts and the good really are *identifications and evaluations, by man’s consciousness*, of

things in reality. Thus, as relational attributes of things in reality and of acts of consciousness, concepts and the good are at once “factual” phenomena and “epistemological” phenomena (Rand [1966–67] 1990, 52).

As a result, Rand and other thinkers have expanded upon her initially ontology-heavy depictions of the intrinsic and subjective views, providing two-sided descriptions showing that these, like the objective view, also have *epistemic* theses (albeit, erroneous ones). Specifically, the intrinsic view holds that man grasps concepts, the good, or whatever, essentially by a passive outward gaze at reality, through a pristine, “diaphanous,” (virtually?) identity-less process of cognition. Naive realism in perception fits this pattern, as do Platonism and Aristotelianism in regard to concepts and Platonism in regard to the good.¹⁴ As Peikoff (1991, 143) puts it, sense qualities and universals are out there, and “we need merely expose ourselves” to them . . . “simply gaze outward and await the imprint of the appropriate externalities.” Similarly, the subjective view holds that man does not grasp concepts and the good in reality, but instead creates them within his mind, a view exemplified by Pragmatism and Existentialism, among others. Kant and the British Empiricists (especially Berkeley and Hume) held a parallel view regarding perception.

So far, we have proceeded inductively, noting two prominent areas in which there are dual metaphysical and epistemological theses of the IOS, as preliminary to our more general formulation of the dual-aspect nature of the objective. Although further, less explicitly formulated examples of this perspective could be adduced from the Objectivist literature¹⁵ and provide a broader basis for induction to the general case, another way of arriving at this conclusion is by means of deduction, based on a consideration of the logical alternatives represented metaphysically, by the presence or absence of a relation between consciousness and existence—and epistemologically, by the two aspects of the Primacy of Existence.

Such a deductive exercise might seem to leave us vulnerable to a charge of Rationalism. However, the use of deduction is not, by itself, tantamount to Rationalism, which only results from deduction if one’s premises are not based upon and reducible to perceptual experience; and none of the premises we are using below is a floating abstraction.

The deductions performed below are all based on premises that are drawn from experience and are part and parcel of our general philosophical knowledge. Thus, these deductions can legitimately be used not only to parallel but, more importantly, to *validate* the inductive generalizations formed from the commonalities in Rand’s and Peikoff’s above-cited applications of IOS—in much the same way that one validates one’s inductive knowledge that “All men are mortal,” by deducing it from something more general that one also knows, viz., that “All living beings are mortal.”

In the present case, what we more generally know are these three things: the Law of the Excluded Middle, the Primacy of Existence, and the fact that sometimes consciousness and existence are cognitively related and sometimes they are not.¹⁶ The logical implications of these three facts are that Rand’s IOS in general is valid, and that so are the specific instances of it already considered as well. Let’s see why that is so.

Proceeding first from the fact that consciousness may or may not relate cognitively to reality, we see that there are two true alternatives that, taken together, generate four possibilities. Either something (such as a concept or the good) exists in reality, or it does not—and either something exists in consciousness, or it does not. These are both true alternatives. Taken together, they conjointly determine a *tetrachotomy*, i.e., four mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive possibilities, one of which *must* be true, and only one of which *can* be true (see Diagram I below):¹⁷

1. Something exists in reality, but apart from consciousness—metaphysical intrinsicism.
2. Something exists both in reality and in consciousness—metaphysical objectivism
3. Something exists in consciousness, but apart from reality—metaphysical subjectivism.
4. Something exists neither in reality nor in consciousness—metaphysical nihilism. (Something does not exist.)

Diagram I

| A Metaphysical Tetrachotomy Relating to Rand's IOS Trichotomy | Something exists in consciousness | Something does not exist in consciousness |
|--|---|---|
| Something exists in reality | Something exists both in reality, and in consciousness → <i>Metaphysical objectivism</i> in regard to that thing. | Something exists in reality, but apart from consciousness → <i>Metaphysical intrinsicism</i> in regard to that thing. |
| Something does not exist in reality | Something exists in consciousness, but apart from reality → <i>Metaphysical subjectivism</i> in regard to that thing. | Something exists neither in reality, nor in consciousness → <i>Metaphysical nihilism</i> in regard to that thing. |

Proceeding next from the Primacy of Existence, we see that there are again two true alternatives that determine a tetrachotomy of possibilities. Either something exists independent of consciousness, or it does not—and consciousness has an identity, or it does not. Taken together, these two true alternatives determine four mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive possibilities, one and only one of which must be true (see Diagram II below):

1. Something exists independent of consciousness, but consciousness does not have an identity—epistemological intrinsicism.
2. Something exists independent of consciousness, and consciousness does have identity—epistemological objectivism.

3. Something does not exist independent of consciousness, but consciousness does have identity—epistemological subjectivism.

4. Something does not exist independent of consciousness, and consciousness does not have identity—epistemological nihilism. (Whatever might exist, there is no way to cognitively grasp it.)

Diagram II

| An Epistemological Tetrachotomy Relating to Rand’s IOS Trichotomy | Consciousness has identity | Consciousness does not have identity |
|---|---|---|
| <p style="text-align: center;">Something exists independent of consciousness</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Something exists independent of consciousness, and consciousness has an identity → <i>Epistemological objectivism</i> in regard to awareness of that thing.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Something exists independent of consciousness, but consciousness does not have an identity → <i>Epistemological intrinsicism</i> in regard to awareness of that thing.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Something does not exist independent of consciousness</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Something does not exist independent of consciousness, but consciousness has an identity → <i>Epistemological subjectivism</i> in regard to awareness of that thing.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Something does not exist independent of consciousness, and consciousness does not have an identity → <i>Epistemological nihilism</i> in regard to awareness of that thing.</p> |

It might be objected that these tetrachotomies are trivial or vacuous, because the fourth possibilities in each case—ontological and epistemological nihilism—are self-refuting and thus are not actual possible positions regarding the good or concepts, while the other

three are actual possible positions, even the erroneous intrinsicist and subjectivist positions. However, even though nihilism is less plausible and more fundamentally flawed than intrinsicism or subjectivism, it is still a logical possibility arising from the conjunction of two true alternatives.¹⁸

Looked at another way, nihilism is the conjunction of the two false premises of intrinsicism (concepts and/or the good does not exist in consciousness) and subjectivism (concepts and/or the good does not exist in reality); and the conjunction of two falsehoods is itself false. Looked at yet another way, nihilism is a real view held (in however contradictory a manner) by some people. In any case, nihilism is a meaningful proposition, and we have to acknowledge it as such and act accordingly, however quickly we may wish to, and to be able to, refute it.

And, happily, we see that once we recognize and acknowledge the facts both that something exists (somewhere), and that we can cognitively grasp it (somehow), both metaphysical and epistemological nihilism in regard to that thing (whether concepts, the good, or whatever) drop out of the picture. This leaves us with the metaphysical and epistemological forms of Rand's threefold IOS.

Based on the convergence of these inductive generalizations and deductive conclusions, we can now offer, with a high degree of confidence, some expanded definitions for the three components of the IOS.

First, the *intrinsic* is that which pertains to an aspect of existence apart from its being held as the object of an act of consciousness. The ultimate physical composition of the aspects of reality that exist apart from consciousness, whether very tiny material entities or instead some form of coherent energy (or whatever), is not an issue for philosophy to settle; and in any case, it is not these components that we perceive but what they compose. As explained by Peikoff (1970, lecture 12), all that philosophy can say is that because reality has identity and is something, it must have *some* qualities independent of consciousness, as against those other qualities that arise in the process of our being aware of reality—i.e., anticipating the definitions to follow, there must be intrinsic aspects of reality as against objective aspects of reality. Also, those aspects of reality can exist not only apart from being held as the object of an act of consciousness, but

also as things that are held as the object of an act of consciousness.¹⁹

Metaphysical intrinsicism, then, is the view that some particular kind of thing can exist intrinsically (i.e., apart from its being held as the object of awareness). Such a view is mistaken when applied to things like the good or essence, which only exist when consciousness cognitively relates to existence. Such a view may in fact be correct when applied to things like entities or their attributes and actions, but only (see preceding paragraph) insofar as they exist *apart from being an object of consciousness*, as against the way in which they also at times exist, as the object of consciousness.

Epistemological intrinsicism is the view that consciousness can grasp something that exists through some passive, identity-less process. Such a view is mistaken across the board, for it denies the identity of consciousness.

Secondly, the *subjective* is that which pertains to an act of consciousness apart from its holding as its object an aspect of existence. Clearly, nothing can be totally subjective,²⁰ because even a hallucination of a pink rat requires some past contact with reality, specifically the past awareness of instances of pink colored objects and of instances of rats. However, such a state of awareness is not, in the moment, in contact with any of the components in reality from which it has generated the image of the pink rat. Thus, at that moment, one’s consciousness is cut off from the reality that provided the material for the hallucination; the material of reality is being reassembled, much in the manner of an artwork, into something that does *not* exist in reality, and thus one’s consciousness, rather than being an instance of veridical perception, is existing apart from its holding as its object a real aspect of existence (viz., pinkness or rats).²¹

In general, strictly speaking, a content of consciousness without *any* relation to existence *now or ever*, is impossible, as Peikoff explains. Consciousness has no content whatever, except what is *derived from* reality. But in a less strict sense, whenever consciousness has a content that is not in contact with reality *at a particular time*, a content that represents an aberration, break, or detachment from reality, then such a content is subjective. The *elements* of the experience do come from reality; it’s just the particular *combination* of elements that is subjective, in the sense of being detached from reality.

Thus, as was the case with the intrinsic, there are distinct

metaphysical and epistemological doctrines about subjective contents and acts of consciousness. *Metaphysical subjectivism* is the view that some particular kind of thing can exist subjectively—i.e., in consciousness, but apart from consciousness holding something as its cognitive object. Such a view is correct only when applied to the contents of hallucinations, dreams, or imagination, which are based on the rearrangements of contents of non-present cognitive acts; but such a view is mistaken when applied to things like the good or essence, which cannot exist in consciousness except insofar as it is cognitively relating to existence. (Nor, specifically, can consciousness itself exist as an object of consciousness except insofar as it is cognitively relating to existence—“consciousness conscious of nothing but itself is a contradiction in terms” (Rand 1957, 933)—so solipsism is just as mistaken as every other form of metaphysical subjectivism.)

Epistemological subjectivism is the view that an act of consciousness can create certain (perhaps all) of its contents apart from any cognitive contact with existence. In regard to conscious acts that generate contents such as those of dreams, hallucinations, etc., this view is correct, so long as one acknowledges that in generating those contents, these acts are making use of other contents ultimately derived from some previous conscious processes that *were* in cognitive contact with existence. But in regard to the acts generating contents such as essences, the good, etc., this view is mistaken, for the acts that generate these contents are, by their very nature, in cognitive contact with existence. (And, for the same reason, and as an epistemological corollary of solipsism, total epistemological subjectivism is mistaken, for a consciousness that generates its contents out of nothing beyond itself is, again, a contradiction in terms; all contents are ultimately if not immediately derived from contents that are generated by an act of consciousness that is in cognitive contact with existence.)

These definitions, while specifying the forms of intrinsicism and subjectivism that lead to pitfalls, also acknowledge the “large grain of truth” referred to earlier—that, metaphysically, there really *are* aspects of existence not being held as the object of an act of awareness; and that, epistemologically, there really *are* acts of awareness not holding as their object an aspect of existence.

However, it is equally important to acknowledge that some acts of awareness really *do* hold aspects of existence as their *object*—and

some aspects of existence really *are* held as the *object* of an act of awareness. In this respect, such interactive aspects of existence and acts of consciousness are *each* properly regarded as “object-ive.”²²

So, thirdly, the definition of “objective” as used in the IOS must be carefully phrased in order to reflect this *dual-aspect* nature of the objective. Rand’s and Peikoff’s clearest statements indicate that the objective is both “[a grasp] of the facts of reality by man’s consciousness” and “an aspect of reality in relation to man.” Generalizing from this, we can define two inseparable but analytically distinguishable aspects of the “objective,” as well as related metaphysical and epistemological doctrines.

The *cognitively objective*, or “ObjectiveC” as I call it, is the epistemic aspect of the objective.²³ It is that which pertains to an act of consciousness insofar as it holds as its object an aspect of existence. *Epistemological objectivism*, then, is Rand’s view of how concepts and/or the good are grasped—i.e., the view that the cognitive power and task of human consciousness is to grasp that which exists and to identify it by a rational standard of thought or evaluation. ObjectiveC (the cognitively objective) and its companion doctrine, epistemological objectivism, have to do with one’s adherence (whether automatic or volitional) to reality, just as the subjective has to do with one’s *failure* to adhere (whether automatically or volitionally) to reality.

Much good work has already been done on ObjectiveC by Peikoff (1991), Kelley (1996/2001), Ross (2001), Raibley (2002), and others. This should simply be carried forward, with the caveat that the application of the concepts of adherence and non-adherence to reality should not be limited to volitional issues, but should also be applied to the issue of perception, as well as to the hitherto little explored issue of introspection.

The other, the *existentially objective*, or “ObjectiveE,” is the ontological aspect of the objective. The existentially objective is that which pertains to an aspect of existence insofar as it is held as the object of an act of consciousness. *Metaphysical objectivism* is Rand’s view that phenomena such as concepts and the good are aspects of reality in relation to man. ObjectiveE (the existentially objective) and its companion doctrine, metaphysical objectivism, thus have to do with the ontological status of sense data, goodness, essence, etc.

Due to the fact that the ObjectiveE has been relatively more

ignored in recent years by Objectivists,²⁴ at least three areas of present confusion or silence in Objectivist philosophy are likely to benefit greatly from such an extension of the IOS: the theory of perception and the ontological status of its contents (along the lines of Peikoff's original model—see below); the theory of propositions, truth, and the ontological status of facts; and the theory of introspection and the ontological status of mind, free will, and “qualia” in general. For a fuller, richer development of Objectivist philosophy, as well as for the advancement of human understanding more generally, it is urgent that these avenues of exploration of the IOS be opened or re-opened.

Part II: The Perilous Pitfall of “The Mind-Independent”: The Existentially Objective, “Objective Reality” and the Primacy of Existence²⁵

In response to previous calls for a restoration of ObjectiveE to discussions of Rand's IOS trichotomy, certain objections have been raised. Some Objectivists question the need for a concept of the existentially objective as the situation or condition into which an aspect of reality enters (i.e., the relational attribute it acquires), when it is in a cognitive (“discovered”) relation to man. The ObjectiveE—as the ontological status of an aspect of reality when it becomes the object of a reality-adhering act of awareness—is, they say, a superfluous or irrelevant kind of objectivity. All we need be concerned with, they claim, is whether or not a given act of awareness is objective, i.e., reality-adhering (ObjectiveC).²⁶

Yet, as noted above, my concept of the ObjectiveE is (according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*) precisely how medieval Scholastic philosophers defined the term “objective”: *being an object before the mind*. (“Object” is late Middle English from the medieval Latin *objectum*, meaning “thing presented to the mind.”) It is the *original* meaning of the word “objective,” and it is not only a distinguishable, but also vitally important, component of Rand's discussion (1965b) of the objective theory of the good.

Every change in usage subsequent to the original formulation of the concept of “objective” has had either a post-Kantian and/or a Randian spin. For this reason, it is helpful to note the stark clash between the traditional, post-Kantian view of the “objective” and the Randian view, the latter having much in common with the pre-

Kantian (Cartesian and Scholastic) views.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* notes and explains the first shift in meanings that occurred. Prior to Kant, “subjective” was most often used to refer to the nature of a thing in itself (i.e., as a thing, a subject), as opposed to “objective,” which referred to the nature of a thing as it is presented to consciousness (i.e., as the object of consciousness).²⁷

After Descartes, however, beginning sporadically throughout the late 1600s and early 1700s, the meaning of the term “subjective” was constricted to refer (as is currently the case) specifically to the nature of the perceiving or thinking consciousness, while “objective” was used to refer to whatever is considered as being independent of the perceiving or thinking self. This shift in usage appears to have been locked in as a result of the implications of Kant’s philosophy. As the *OED* tersely puts it, “current use appears to be derived from Kant, and to appear in English subsequently to 1790, and chiefly after 1817.”

How this seems to have happened is explained by Pols. Although Kant (1781/1787/1929) held the world of common sense and science to be objective—in the original Scholastic sense of an object presented to the mind—he viewed the *source* of its objectivity as being *subjective* (Pols 1998, 25, 147). The world we perceive, Kant claimed, originates in the cognitive powers of the human subject and that the world we perceive is a “representation,” *Vorstellung*, which means “literally, something *placed before* the knower *by* the knower” (110).

However, Kant is not talking about subjectivity in the sense of the individual feelings, biases, etc. that distinguish one person from another. Instead, Pols says, Kant conceives of a kind of non-particular or *transcendental* subjectivity that all individuals share, and that gives to objectivity (i.e., something’s appearing before the mind) a “pattern of universality and necessity that common sense takes to exist independently of the knower” (110, citing Kant 1781/1787/1929, 337).

This equation of objectivity with an impression of independent existence generated by a sort of collective subjectivity laid the groundwork for “objective” coming to be thought of, following Kant, as mind-independent, i.e., existing independently of consciousness, its predominant contemporary meaning.²⁸ This sense of “objective” is

so qualified, however, that no end of philosophers have questioned what to most people is, in Pols' words, "today's commonsense association of 'real' and 'objective'" (110).

As for the second, Randian, shift in meanings, it is interesting to note, in this connection, that Rand spoke of "Objective Reality" in her earlier writings.²⁹ This phrase seems to reflect the traditional, post-Kantian usage: independent of consciousness.

Fortunately, however, Rand subsequently stopped using the phrase "Objective Reality," using instead the terms "Primacy of Existence" for *independent of* consciousness and "intrinsic" for *apart from* consciousness. At about this same time (the mid-1960s), Rand also began referring to phenomena such as the good (see 1965b) as "objective," insofar as they were things in reality existing before the mind (viz., "aspects of reality in relation to man . . . evaluated by a rational standard of value"), thus reflecting the Scholastic concept of the objective as existential.³⁰

So, there has been an interesting tension between Rand's two different usages of "objective." Earlier, in speaking of "Objective Reality," she referred to things existing independently of consciousness as being "objective," in the post-Kantian sense of the term. Yet, later, as in the pre-Modern (Scholastic) and early Modern (Cartesian and Kantian) sense of the term, Rand also used "objective" to refer to an aspect of reality held as an object by an act of consciousness—the ObjectiveE, or the "out-there as perceived in-here," to use one of Peikoff's colloquialisms. And despite her having quietly phased out the former usage at about the same time she phased in the new usage, many of Rand's supporters apparently believe that both usages are still in effect, and go to considerable lengths to try to reconcile the apparent contradictions or to otherwise deal with the tension between them.³¹

It is important and helpful, then, to clarify how this existential sense of "objective," ObjectiveE, relates to Rand's metaphysical principle of the Primacy of Existence, which she expressed in her earlier writings in terms of "Objective Reality." The Primacy of Existence views reality as being that which is "out there," period; it holds that existence is independent of consciousness or, as is sometimes said, "mind-independent."³² Existence—and that means *anything* that exists—*can* be the object of awareness, it *can* exist in a

cognitive relationship to consciousness, but it exists even if it is not such an object or in such a relationship.

Peikoff (1991, 117) says that this latter usage of “objective,” “Objective Reality,” is “harmless,” but is it? There appears to be a problem. Consciousness exists, too. Does this mean that consciousness is independent of consciousness? The possible implications are horrendous. Is concept-formation independent of perception? Is imagination independent of perception? Is memory independent of cognition?

Clearly, in order to avoid the disastrous implications of the notion of “Objective Reality,” we need a more detailed analysis. In particular, we need an additional distinction, that between a *generating* and a *viewing* (or, in the general sense, “perceiving”) consciousness.

According to the Primacy of Existence, everything that exists is independent of a *viewing* consciousness; a viewing consciousness cannot create (or destroy or change) what it is viewing. A viewing consciousness is metaphysically passive in relation to its object. However, both objective and subjective aspects of reality are dependent upon a *generating* consciousness. And only certain intrinsic aspects of reality—namely, those that are neither viewed by nor generated by consciousness—are independent of *both* a viewing and a generating consciousness.

On the other hand, acts of consciousness that are not themselves being held as the object of introspection, while dependent upon a generating consciousness, are nonetheless independent of a viewing consciousness, and thus intrinsic. In other words, even though such acts are cognitively objective (i.e., ObjectiveC) in regard to reality, they are also existentially *intrinsic* insofar as there is no act of introspection holding them as its object.

In this connection, it is interesting to note that while Rand’s original formulation of “objectivity” (1965a) was twofold, it had nothing to do with either Rand’s notion of “Objective Reality” or her IOS trichotomy; nor was it equivalent to the distinction in this essay between ObjectiveE and ObjectiveC. Instead, it was an *ethical* matter, an aspect of rationality. For Rand, rationality, the basic virtue, entailed the respect for and *recognition of* facts. Every other virtue was an aspect of rationality and involved, in some way, the recognition of a significant fact of reality.

Objectivity, too, was a virtue for Rand, in that it involved one's recognition of two basic aspects of "the relationship of consciousness to existence" (1965a, 7). To be metaphysically objective, or to possess metaphysical objectivity, one must *recognize* that the world exists and is what it is "independent of any perceiver's consciousness." Consciousness holds existence as its object; it does not create the world. To be epistemologically objective, or to possess epistemological objectivity, one must *recognize* that, to know the world, man must adhere to reality by using a specific means (reason) in accordance with a certain method (logic). Consciousness can know the world as it is; it is not blocked from reality and need not distort reality, but knowledge is not automatic or causeless.

In each case, however, it must be remembered that we are speaking of the objectivity not of reality, but of one's recognition of how reality and awareness relate to one another—i.e., not of "Objective Reality," but of one's *objective recognition* of reality's being independent of awareness. That is, both elements of the distinction made by Rand in her earlier 1965 essay are volitional aspects of ObjectiveC, of a consciousness (and person) that is adhering to reality. It was not until later that year that Rand began to articulate both ObjectiveC (in its more general form) and ObjectiveE.

As for reality, as Peikoff (1991, 117) correctly noted, it does not, strictly speaking, have objectivity in itself. What he failed to note, however, is that just as consciousness is only objective in relation to reality, so too is *reality* objective *in relation to consciousness*—and *only* in relation to consciousness. Thus, to speak of "Objective Reality," i.e., of reality as *being* objective, *apart from* consciousness, is a contradiction.

Whether or not Rand actually recognized this error, she in effect corrected it by introducing the term "intrinsic" in referring to existence *apart from* consciousness, and by introducing the phrase "Primacy of Existence" in referring to the *independence* of existence from consciousness. In this way, she was able to abandon the misleading phrase "Objective Reality," and perhaps not coincidentally, she did so at the same time the new terminology was introduced.

The metaphysical aspect of objectivity, most commonly referred to by Objectivists as the Primacy of Existence, is sometimes also referred to as "metaphysical objectivity" or "metaphysical objectivism" or "metaphysical realism." Rand's wisely abandoned phrase

“Objective Reality” has often been taken to reflect this metaphysical view, that reality is the *object*, not the subject or creation of consciousness.

But is this true? In one sense, no. Consciousness is real, too, and some real aspects of consciousness are generated by, created by, a person’s conscious acts. Both subjective aspects, such as dreams or imagination, and objective aspects, such as sense data, are generated by consciousness (i.e., a person’s being conscious). But in another sense, yes. Even things generated by consciousness are not generated by an act of consciousness that *views* them.

Thus, while consciousness (i.e., a person being conscious) helps *create* objective and subjective (but not intrinsic) aspects of reality, consciousness (a person being conscious) does not create them in the process of *viewing* them (i.e., holding them as its *object*). Everything that is held as the *object* of an act of viewing-consciousness is independent of *that* act of consciousness. In other words, everything that is held as the *object* of an act of viewing-consciousness has *metaphysical primacy* over that act of consciousness. Even subjective phenomena (e.g., fantasies, etc.) have metaphysical primacy over an act of consciousness that holds them as its object!

So, “Objective Reality” is a deeply ambiguous, misleading term. In full, it means: that which, in existing (or being able to exist) *as the object* of an act of consciousness is not thereby *the creation* of that act of consciousness.

Everything that exists, *all* of Reality, is “objective” in this sense, even subjective (consciousness-generated but non-consciousness-viewing) and intrinsic (non-consciousness-viewed) aspects of reality. As a consequence, this use of the term is vacuous, which may be another reason why Rand seems to have quietly phased it out in favor of Primacy of Existence.³³

Furthermore, “mind-independent” is vacuous in this sense, as well. Everything that is being held as the object of a mind is uncreated by, and thus independent of, *that* act of a mind—even objective (ObjectiveC) and subjective phenomena that are generated by some other act of a mind than the act that views them.

The only sense of “mind-independent” that is *not* vacuous is that which pertains to things that are uncreated by any act of mind (i.e., anything that exists other than acts and products of consciousness)—

as against things that are generated by an act of mind (i.e., objective and subjective aspects of reality). And the only sense of “objective” that is not vacuous is that which pertains to things *insofar as* they are held as the object of an act of consciousness—as against the “intrinsic” (i.e., things *apart from* an act of consciousness that holds them as its object)—and as against the “subjective” (i.e., acts of awareness *apart from* a thing that they hold as their object).

Thus, while it might be thought that the “intrinsic” (in Rand’s sense) and the non-vacuous sense of “mind-independent” are equivalent or near-equivalent terms, the latter has seriously misleading implications. The “mind-independent/mind-dependent” distinction is a non-fundamental distinction, a “package deal.” It lumps together as “mind-dependent” both the polar opposite of mind-independence (the subjective) and a third view (the objective), which is fundamentally opposed to both of them.

The non-vacuous sense of “objective,” however, has no misleading implications. It fundamentally opposes itself to both false, incomplete alternatives, showing them to be “opposite sides of the same coin.” For this reason, the “mind-independent/mind-dependent” distinction, and its other, traditional form, “objective/subjective,” should be avoided as vacuous at best, misleading and pernicious at worst. Instead, Rand’s IOS should be retained as a fundamental distinction of mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive possibilities for the relationship between existence and consciousness.

Part III: The Tragic Transformation of Rand’s Trichotomy: Peikoff’s Capitulation on Perception

Thus far I have offered a new derivation and validation of the IOS, and an endorsement of Rand’s moving away from the pitfalls inherent in her earlier, “Objective Reality” verbiage. However, as I have intimated above, Rand’s IOS has not achieved its full potential in explicating various philosophical problems. Further, one of its most promising early applications, the analysis of perception in terms of IOS, was abandoned—at Rand’s behest, no less.

How did this happen? What prompted the “epistemologizing” and “volitionizing” of the objective that has so hobbled the philosophy of Objectivism for the past 35 years? And could it have been avoided, short of a radical analysis of the kind offered above? To

answer these questions, we must go back to the beginning of the IOS, or a point very near it, and see how things went awry, primarily between Rand and Peikoff.

It is clear that Rand initially envisioned a broad role in her philosophy for the trichotomy. As she stated in the passage quoted earlier ([1966–67] 1990): “[T]he dichotomy of ‘intrinsic or subjective’ has played havoc with this issue [the nature of concepts], as it has with *every* issue involving the relationship of consciousness to existence” (53; emphasis added). “Every issue” would certainly seem to include the relationship of *perception* to reality and, in particular, the issue Peikoff has referred to as “the metaphysical status of sense data.”³⁴

However, Rand and Peikoff appear to have been of two minds on the matter. In her initial work on epistemology, Rand ([1966–67] 1990, 1) said that she regarded perception as direct, that man perceives concrete entities directly. In the same work, Rand discussed the two realist (Platonist and Aristotelian) schools’ view of concepts and universals as being intrinsic, “as special existents unrelated to man’s consciousness—to be perceived by man directly,” though not by sensory means (53). She said that theories of universals fashioned on the model of direct perception are intrinsicist.

Now (as a rather substantial aside), does this mean that Rand regarded the objects of direct perception, *entities*, as being intrinsic, while merely rejecting the view that universals, *also*, are intrinsic? In other words, is it possible that Rand originally (and perhaps unknowingly) held an intrinsicist position in regard to the ontological status of entities?³⁵

This possibility is alluded to by Ray and Radcliffe (2000), who argue that:

[I]t may seem to us, unreflectively, that any particular piece of reality that we want to call ‘entity’ *was* separate—intrinsically, independently, and before we noticed it. But to conclude that this is the case is to reverse cause and effect. . . . It is the focus of a conscious subject’s attention on a given portion of reality that justifies and explains classifying that portion of reality as an entity . . .

Also see Jilk (2003, 67), who states that “the division of existence into

entities is a result of epistemological processes and is not intrinsic to existence” and points out that “Rand . . . did not discuss explicitly whether entities are intrinsically separate . . .” (69).

The claims of Ray, Radcliffe, and Jilk are consistent with the implications of Peikoff (1972), who, in refuting the primary-secondary qualities distinction, said that “*all* the qualities we perceive are facts of independent reality as perceived by human consciousness.” If all the qualities we perceive are facts of reality as perceived by consciousness, the argument goes, then so are the entities we perceive; so, if sensory qualities are objective, rather than intrinsic or subjective, then entities are objective, rather than intrinsic or subjective, as well.

This seeming conundrum is actually a false dichotomy. It is simply not true that some part of reality is only *classifiable* as an entity if and when there is a conscious person who is focusing on that part of reality. In point of fact, its being *classified* as an entity depends not only epistemologically on a conscious person’s focusing on and *classifying* it, but also metaphysically on its being *classifiable* as an entity. Entities *as objects of awareness* are contextual and thus “epistemological” or existentially objective, ObjectiveE—but *as really existing*, they are also factual or “metaphysical” or existentially intrinsic.

Thus, it is an error to focus only on the former, the “epistemological,” in one’s characterizations of entities. It is an error to fail to distinguish between an entity-as-an-existent and an entity-as-an-object-of-awareness. Our freedom to “treat or not treat” something as an entity is simply that: the power to focus or not focus on a particular independently existing entity as the object of awareness. “Treating” something as an entity does not *make* it an entity—and “not treating” it as an entity does not make it *not* an entity.

There is an implicit assumption or argument on the part of Ray et al. that because entities *can* exist as cognitively distinct from their surroundings, they can *only* exist as cognitively distinct from their surroundings. This begs the question. Instead, it is reasonable to conclude not only that these things are entities *when* they are separated by an act of awareness, but also (and more fundamentally) *because* they *can* be separated by an act of awareness. This is why just about anything one can focus on qualifies as an entity—not because one *focuses* on it, but because it *is such that one can focus* on it.

Recognizing the difference in these explanations—the episte-

mological view vs. the metaphysical view (or the existentially objective vs. the existentially intrinsic, or entities as objects of consciousness vs. entities apart from consciousness)—is crucial to understanding the Objectivist position on the nature of entities. In making cognitive decisions, we are not deciding whether something *is* or *is not* an entity. We are deciding whether to *focus* on something as an entity or not to do so. A thing *is* (or is not) an entity *regardless* of whether we focus on it and hold it as the object of awareness.

Thus, it is not we who decide, by our cognitive choices, what is or is not an entity, but reality. Our epistemological decision-making and classifying is *not* at odds with the discovery of what reality “decides” (i.e., determines). We decide to focus on this entity or that entity, which is an entity whether or not we decide to focus on it.

There is an additional reason one might suspect that Rand viewed the contents of perception as at least partly intrinsic. In her treatise on epistemology, Rand ([1966–67] 1990, 31) states that the measurable attributes of psychological processes (presumably including perception) are the object, or content, of the process and its intensity, and that “the content is some aspect of the external world (or is derived from some aspect of the external world) and is measurable by the various methods applicable to the external world.” If, then, the content of perception is an aspect of the world and exists there independently of our perception or measurement, it would seem to be basically intrinsic. Yet, as Boydston (2004, 272) argues, “perceptual systems measure,” “cognitive systems are measurement systems,” etc., which implies that contents of percepts are measured in the course of sensory reception and neuronal computational processing. This in turn implies an objective status for sensory contents. How, then, should this apparent conflict be resolved?

Sensory content, especially in the form of physical objects or entities and their attributes, does seem to be intrinsic, independent of consciousness. If I look at my computer desk with, then without, my glasses, the apparent shape of the desk will vary. That shape will have been transformed, in regular ways, by the optical nature of my eyeglasses and by the physiological nature of my visual system’s processing of the sense data generated by my desk’s shape. But appropriate physical measurement of the desk will show its true shape, which, presumably, exists independently of my awareness of it. Thus,

it would seem, shape, like entities, is an intrinsic feature of reality.

It is important to realize, however, that the content of a percept is not just some aspect of the external world *per se*, as one might infer from Rand's ([1966–67] 1990) succinct statement, but some aspect of the external world *held as the object of an act of perception*. Thus, sensory contents are existentially objective, not intrinsic. The aspect of the external world that is held as the object of perception *is* intrinsic to reality, but in respect of its being held as an object of perception (and thus in respect of its being the content of perception), it is existentially objective. That is, apart from awareness, an aspect of the external world is intrinsic, but held as the object of awareness, i.e., qua content of awareness, it is ObjectiveE. In other words, an aspect of reality can have either ontological status, intrinsic or objective, depending upon its circumstance in regard to a conscious being.

The following distinction may help to clarify this point. An aspect of reality is a *potential* content of awareness, insofar as it *can be* held as the object of awareness. In this respect only, an aspect of reality is intrinsic. However, an aspect of reality is an *actual* content of awareness, insofar as it *is being* held as the object of awareness. That is, in this respect, an aspect of reality is objective, ObjectiveE, if and when it is cognitively grasped as a *formed content* of awareness (that act of reality-adhering awareness being ObjectiveC, of course).

More recently, in his lecture series on modern philosophy, Peikoff (1970, lecture 11) introduced the trichotomy by illustrating it in terms of the ontological status of sensory qualities. In his ancient philosophy series, Peikoff (1972, lecture 12) was still referring to various erroneous views of the nature of sense data as being “subjective” or “intrinsic,” and he did refer tersely to sensations as being “cognitive elements, *objective* indicators in a certain form of what is out there” (emphasis added).

Yet, by the time of his lectures on Objectivism, Peikoff (1976, lecture 4) had ceased using any of the terms of the trichotomy in discussing the ontology of sense data. Then, in his book on Objectivism, he formalized this change in policy by arguing that the distinction between intrinsic, objective, and subjective does not apply to sense perception, which “cannot depart from reality,” but only to conceptual-level processes, which are governed by our volitional faculty (Peikoff 1991, 112, 117).

The triggering cause of Peikoff’s decision to no longer apply the trichotomy to perception was a purportedly “casual” remark by Rand to Peikoff after one of his lectures, perhaps in 1972, although arguably earlier, in 1970. A questioner asked: What are the things that you did in the past that you’re right about now? Peikoff (1987, Q&A Session #1) replies:

I’ll tell you one really gross error that’s on one of the tapes. I applied the objective-subjective-intrinsic trichotomy to sense perception. I took the view that sense experience was objective—this was many years ago—as opposed to being intrinsic or subjective, and tried to develop a whole thing around that, which is completely wrong, because the concept of “objectivity” only *arises* on the conceptual level. There’s no choice, and there’s no method with regard to sense percepts. They’re just *given*. And that was thoroughly confusing. That must have cost me three years of mental development, just that one error. As I remember, Ayn Rand casually said to me, “You know, that wasn’t too clear, because you made it sound as though sense perceptions are objective.” And I said, “Well, what do you mean?” [Laughter]

On the seemingly smallest of equivocations or confusions, the fate of a philosophical movement sometimes hinges. This seems to be such an instance. Peikoff’s original discussion, it should be noted, was in terms not of the cognitively objective nature of one’s “sense experience” or “sense perceptions,” but the cognitively objective nature of one’s *classification* of the ontological status of sense data. That is, it was not about the “method with regard to” *forming* sense percepts—which, of course, are formed automatically, *without* method—but about the “method with regard to” *categorizing* sense percepts, and there are three approaches to categorizing them in terms of their ontological status. It was not about the “choice” in *having* sense data, but the very real choice one makes between the three general *views* of the relation of sense data to existence and consciousness.

Peikoff clearly was attempting to characterize sense data in the same manner that Rand had characterized concepts and the good just

several years previously. He was trying to argue that sense data had objective *ontological* (existential) status (which he also colloquially labeled as the “the out-there, as perceived by the in-here”), in contrast to those theorists who argued that sense data existed apart from consciousness (the intrinsicist view) or apart from existence (the subjectivist view).

Rand’s overriding concern, however, was for Peikoff to explicitly acknowledge that sense perceptions (i.e., processes of perceiving) were not *epistemically* (cognitively) objective, by which she meant: *volitionally* adherent to reality. She apparently thought, mistakenly, that characterizing sense data as objective in their ontological status somehow might mislead listeners into thinking that sense data were the product of deliberate, volitional adherence to reality.

Peikoff could have attempted to sort this all out. He could have pointed out that his usage of the term “objective” pertained (and properly applied) to the ontological nature of the *content* of perception, while Rand wanted to deny usage of the term as it pertains to the epistemic nature of the *action* of perception. This approach could at least have salvaged ObjectiveE in regard to perception and cleared up, at the outset, a confusion that has persisted in discussions of Objectivist philosophy to this day. (But, as will be noted below, it would not have been a perfect solution.)

Unfortunately, however, Peikoff instead bowed completely to Rand’s wishes about how to use the term “objective,” accepting her claim that his use of it in regard to perception was an error. Consequently, he began to constrict his use of the terms “subjective,” “intrinsic,” “objective” and “out there . . . in here,” never again using them to refer to theories of the ontological status of sense data. He managed to preserve only the barest vestige of his earlier terminology by continuing to use the “out there” and “in here” ontological-status language³⁶ to refer to *every* form of *incorrect* idea about the products of the relationship between existence and consciousness, *including* its application to the issue of the nature of sense data.³⁷

Even apart from the confusion just noted between existential and cognitive senses of “objective,” there is another, purely epistemic problem in the decision to use “objective” more restrictively. Whether or not Peikoff actually realized that he and Rand were at cross-purposes, he still could have avoided making such drastic

changes in his presentation by challenging her on the epistemic issue of whether the concept of “objectivity” should be applied solely to that which *volitionally* adheres to reality.

As Peikoff (1991, 144) says in his definition of the trichotomy, the “view” or “approach” of existence-apart-from-consciousness and that of consciousness-apart-from-existence are referred to, respectively, as “intrinsicism” or “subjectivism”—and they are so “*in any variant?*” (emphasis added). As with Rand’s initial statement (“every issue involving the relationship of consciousness to existence”), this would seem to include views of the nature of perception.

That is, it would seem that Peikoff (1970) was originally on the right track, when he categorized the Naive Realist view of perception as a form of intrinsicism (“the qualities we perceive are out there in reality, independent of us”) and Berkeley’s Subjective Idealism as a form of subjectivism (“all of the qualities are simply subjective experiences in our own consciousness”)—and that his later eschewing of this terminology to characterize these views of perception was an unfortunate error, made as the result of his being led by Rand into rejecting the objective nature of perception and its contents.

Instead, however, Peikoff (1991, 112, 117) settled for an exclusionary stance, arguing that a normative term such as “objectivity” cannot be applied to perception, because perception, being an automatic process, “cannot depart from reality.”^{38, 39} It is as if Rand had said in her initial statement: “The dichotomy of ‘intrinsic or subjective’ has played havoc with this issue [the nature of concepts], as it has with every issue involving the relationship of *volitional* consciousness to existence” (which, of course, she did not).

Surely, though, Peikoff’s exclusionary stance toward the objectivity of perception begs the question. It seems reasonable to assume that Rand meant exactly what she said, and to ask why *non-volitional* adherence to reality does not also merit the label “objective” or “objectivity.” That is, why not allow for a *non-volitional, non-normative* use of “objective” and “objectivity,” along with the volitional, normative usage? And why not regard both of these usages as special cases or species of adherence to reality per se, with the more general concept of “adherence to reality” not specifying the presence or absence of normativity or volition?

Peikoff has offered no good reason not to apply these terms

inclusively, along with “objectivism”—as he originally did and, indeed, as the literal wording of Rand’s earliest statement *mandated* that we apply them—to the variants that pertain to the ontological status of sense data. Granted, some conscious processes are *automatically* reality-adherent, but what is important (in regard to the trichotomy) is that they are automatically *reality-adherent*. They adhere to reality automatically.

In general, intrinsicism, subjectivism, and objectivism are all *real* views of the *ontological* status of products of the relationship between existence and consciousness, and those views are held not just in regard to the content of volitional processes, but also in regard to the content of non-volitional processes such as perception, dreaming, etc. It pertains, as Peikoff himself defines it, to the ontological status of “phenomena of existence apart from consciousness” (intrinsic) vs. “phenomena of consciousness apart from existence” (subjective) vs. phenomena of consciousness interacting with existence (objective) (144).⁴⁰

Also, intrinsicism, subjectivism, and objectivism are all real views of the *epistemic* nature of the relationship between existence and consciousness, and those views apply just as much to perception as to conceptual processes. Either perception is awareness of internal contents, with no adherence to reality (subjectivism)—or adherence to external objects, by means of a passive gaze (intrinsicism)—or adherence to external objects, by means of an active processing of sense data (objectivism). These are all real views. Granted, two of them are in error, but this is the case for *every* application of the trichotomy, whether or not the phenomenon concerned involves volition.

Once the distinction between content and action of awareness is clearly drawn, and epistemic objectivity is defined broadly in terms of reality-adherence (rather than narrowly in terms of *volitional* reality-adherence), it can be seen that there was never any need to abandon one of the most illuminating applications of the trichotomy that Objectivism had to offer. True, Rand and Peikoff didn’t abandon the trichotomy *entirely*, or even for the most part, but just in regard to the issue of perception—and even then only in regard to terminology. But that abandonment is bad enough, in terms of the confusion and inconsistency with past writings.⁴¹

In summary: there is a vital distinction to be made between, on the one hand, the ontological issue of the *nature* of products of psychological processes (forms of existence-consciousness interaction) in general and, on the other, the epistemic issue of the nature of *valid* volitional psychological processes in particular. In other words, it is important to distinguish between objective *contents* of consciousness (the *reality* of the content) and objective *actions* of consciousness (the *validity* of the action).⁴² Terminology clearly applying to the former has been misidentified in some cases as applying only to the latter, thus constricting the range of application of the trichotomy and rendering the Objectivist philosophy more muddled and less systematically unified than it should be.

There is a second, narrower, though equally vital distinction to be made, between the automatically objective nature of reality-adherent perceptual-level processes and the non-automatically objective nature of reality-adherent conceptual-level processes. The fact that only the latter processes involve deliberate error-checking for the sake of reality-adherence does not in any way negate the validity and objective nature (reality-adherence) of the former processes. Again, terminology clearly applying to the former has been misidentified as applying only to the latter, with a consequent constriction of the IOS and a loss of clarity and unity in the structure and content of Objectivism. A further consequence of these constrictions of the trichotomy is that the correct view of the nature of mind and will has been more difficult to integrate and longer in the development than it should have been.

Conclusion: A Trichotomy—If You Can Keep It!

The suggestions made in this essay are aimed at providing a clearer, simpler, and more tightly integrated view of the IOS—moreover, one that is more consistent with Rand’s original statement of the trichotomy. Some have objected to these suggestions, claiming that this approach will either “destroy” cognitive (ethical-epistemic) objectivity by “watering it down with” existential objectivity, or “overly complicate” the Objectivist position by “adding in” existential objectivity.⁴³

These are odd claims, considering that ObjectiveE, the existentially objective, the “where” of the objective, is right there, in plain

sight, in Rand's initial formulation of IOS and in Peikoff's discussion of it, and one has to work really hard not to see it. It would be more accurate to say that the current approach "adds back" the existentially objective, except, again, it merely recognizes and underscores what has always been there. It is "adding it back" only in the sense that it is restoring the existentially objective to its original and rightful place in the discussion and application of the concept of "the objective," over the objections of those who have, for whatever reason, persistently ignored it or attempted to deny its reality or relevance.

Again, for clarity's sake: there is no intention here to undermine cognitive objectivity and no need to fear that this interpretation of Rand's IOS would undermine it. Instead, the aim is merely to uncover and highlight and restore the usefulness of something that Rand really meant to say, and actually did say at the outset, but subsequently neglected to clarify and to consistently espouse and to develop in more detail.

So, armed with the explicit distinction between the cognitively and existentially objective (ObjectiveC and ObjectiveE), we now have a more balanced view of the structural and methodological nature of the philosophy of Objectivism. Furthermore, in practical terms, we are now better prepared to address a number of issues in philosophy, such as the existentially objective nature of mind and will, and the cognitively objective nature of our awareness of mind (i.e., the validity of introspection), and the restoration of Peikoff's original, lucid discussion of the existentially objective nature of sense data.

Notes

1. This essay is a revised version of a portion of Bissell 2003. I am much indebted to Stephen Boydston, who made numerous suggestions in personal correspondence for its improvement, as well as the helpful remarks of an anonymous reviewer.

2. In particular, I am thinking of Peikoff (1991, 117), who says that "the actual purpose of the concept ["objective"] . . . is to be found not in metaphysics, but in epistemology. Strictly speaking, existents are not objective; they simply are. It is minds, and specifically conceptual processes, that are objective—or nonobjective." He maintains this perspective in his more recent lecture series (2004) and forthcoming book, *The DIM Hypothesis: The Epistemological Mechanics by which Philosophy Shapes Society*. Also see Ross (2001), who says that objectivity is the characteristic of "proper thinking," that intrinsicism and subjectivism are two broad categories of faulty "styles of thinking" and philosophical theories derived by such thinking, and that Rand identified these concepts "in order to help us understand objectivity [and secondarily]

to help us classify and thus understand certain philosophical and psycho-epistemological [i.e., thinking] errors.” It is this kind of widespread bias against—and/or neglect of—the ontological aspect of the objective that this essay is intended to combat.

3. For the purpose of this essay, “volitional” is taken to refer to the non-automatic, deliberate mental functions, and “non-volitional” to the automatic, non-deliberate functions of consciousness. No presumption is made or denied that volition is a capacity to have done differently than one did in a particular situation. That issue will be addressed in an essay sequel to this one. See also Note 4.

4. More specifically, the IOS, as developed in this essay, can be seen to imply that just as sense data are neither intrinsic nor subjective, but objective, the same is true of the contents of our introspective awareness of mind, will, and the various capacities and actions associated with them. These implications, as well as the broader issue of free will vs. determinism, will be addressed in a subsequent essay.

5. This portion of the essay is based on Bissell 2006b. It has benefitted greatly from feedback offered by the Objectivist Center Graduate Seminar’s director Will Thomas and others.

6. As with other terms such as “selfishness” or “egoism” or “capitalism,” there is a distinct semantic and conceptual clash between common usage and Objectivism’s preferred definition of the term “objective.” In terms of common usage, Rand’s approach, not to mention the present proposed clarification of that approach, may appear unorthodox, even idiosyncratic. Rand really stirred the pot when she rejected the traditional false dichotomy of “objective” vs. “subjective,” replacing the former notion with a distinction between “intrinsic” and “objective.” The present essay proposes, if anything, to intensify the pot-stirring. Once the triad of concepts in the IOS is carefully defined, a clearer view of things does eventually result, but there is still an enormous obstacle to face in convincing people to make such a major change in how they use the concepts.

7. For other attempts to deal with this false dichotomy, see Sciabarra 1995 (155), which cites Adorno, Derrida, Foucault, Gadamer, Heidegger, Husserl, and Wittgenstein in this connection. See also Joad 1957, Deely 1990, Pols 1998, and Lakoff and Johnson 1999. Of these, the attempt by Lakoff and Johnson 1999 may stand the best chance of success. Arguing, as they do, that phenomena of consciousness are neither “objective” (mind-independent) nor “subjective” (world-independent), but instead “interactional” (24), is a very crafty way to approach the problem. It requires the least changes in inherited semantic infrastructure, while permitting the most desirable changes in conceptual superstructure. We could wish that our culture would adopt the Randian *set of labels*, and eschew the more prevalent, modern usage of “objective” as mind-independent; but it is far more important that an adequate *conceptual distinction* is adopted. And what Lakoff and Johnson are arguing for seems very close to the IOS of Rand’s Objectivism.

8. The historical development of the concept of the “objective,” from the medieval Thomistic version to the presently favored, post-Kantian version is briefly discussed in Part II of this essay.

9. It is clear from the context that the “relation to man” Rand is talking about is not only the relation of being-able-to-satisfy-a-need, which by itself would make something a *potential* good, but also the cognitive-evaluative relation of being-

evaluated-as-need-satisfying-by-a-rational-standard-of-value, which elevates a thing to the status of *actual* good. It should be noted that there are actually two concepts of “intrinsic good,” one being crude or naive value-intrinsicism, the Platonic-Moorean view that something is good “just because,” apart from *any* relation to a person or benefit or purpose, and the other being a more sophisticated view, where something is potentially good, because, quite apart from anyone’s acknowledgement of it, it has the ability to fulfill a need. Such a potential good, which one has not yet discovered and chosen, is thus actually, in a certain sense, intrinsically good. Note that this is a *non-pejorative* usage of “intrinsic.” There is nothing wrong with acknowledging that some things are intrinsic, if they truly are! However, good in the fullest, actual sense is not intrinsic, but objective, as Rand argues. I am indebted to Douglas B. Rasmussen for discussions clarifying this point. Further exploration of the ramifications of this point—in particular, possible inconsistencies and implied Kantianism in Rand’s view of the good—is beyond the scope of this essay, but see Rasmussen 2002, 85 and Rasmussen 2006, 320–24.

10. These erroneous views, like Rand’s correct view, are ontological, rather than epistemological, because they specifically concern concepts from the aspect of their being universals, *things in reality viewed in a certain way*, rather than concepts as being *forms of awareness*. Both aspects co-exist in all relationships of objectivity between consciousness and existence, of course. To repeat: it is the aim of this essay to urge the restoration of the ontological aspect of the objective to its full, deserved place of importance in Objectivist philosophy.

11. Parallel applications to issues such as the ontological status of truth, for instance, date back at least to Aquinas and are obvious and straightforward: the truth resides in an aspect of reality in relation to man’s consciousness (i.e., in *an aspect of reality as known by man’s consciousness*)—and the truth resides in man’s consciousness in relation to reality (i.e., in *man’s consciousness as knowing an aspect of reality*). Or, paraphrasing Rand’s definition of the good: the truth is neither an attribute of ‘things in themselves’ nor of man’s cognitive states, but *an identification of a fact of reality by man’s consciousness* according to a rational standard of cognition . . . [i.e.,] *an aspect of reality in relation to man*. I am indebted to Timothy D. Chase for discussions leading to this insight.

12. I owe this example to Will Thomas who is not responsible, however, for the use I have made of it!

13. Objectivity is the relationship between (a person engaging in) an act of cognitive awareness and the aspect of reality that it holds as its object. (For the purpose of this essay, evaluative awareness is considered to be a species of cognitive awareness.) Because awareness is epistemically active and its object is epistemically passive, the relationship of objectivity is generated by the action of awareness in adhering to the object in reality. Although we may also speak in a secondary sense of the relational attribute of “objectivity” of such an action of awareness or its object, it is less confusing to instead speak of their being “objective,” and this essay will adhere to that usage for the most part, reserving the term “objectivity” as the primary term, designating the relationship between awareness and object.

14. See Smith 2002 for a sophisticated critique of Naive Realism and defense of Direct or “Critical” Realism in regard to perception.

15. The dual-aspect nature of the objective runs throughout Rand’s epistemol-

ogy, though it has not been widely recognized just how extensively it applies. For instance, where does redness exist? It is the apple as it appears to me, i.e., an aspect of the way the apple appears to me “in respect of [its] reflectance properties,” and it is the form in which I am aware of the apple, an aspect “of the means by which [I am] directly aware of those properties” (Kelley 1986, 111). Perceptual appearance and perceptual form are two forms of the objective—the existentially objective and the cognitively objective, respectively (defined later in this part of the essay)—which are the relational attributes that arise from the relationship of perceptual objectivity between an aspect of reality and a perceiver who holds it as the object of perception. Although Kelley would perhaps demur from my inclusion of his analysis as an example of the dual-aspect of the objective, it clearly fits the pattern, which can be extended to numerous other issues, such as the nature of conceptual units (see Rand [1966–67] 1990, 6–7) and the problems of the mind-body relationship and the nature of the will (to be discussed in the essay sequel to this one).

16. Any readers of this essay who happen to hold these Aristotelian and Objectivist propositions as floating abstractions are hereby directed to Leonard Peikoff’s two excellent sets of lectures, *Objectivism Through Induction* (1997) and *Induction in Physics and Philosophy* (2002), for guidance in the methodology needed to convert those propositions to inductively validated knowledge.

17. A tetrachotomy is the restatement, as a disjunctive proposition, of the logical conjunction of two dichotomies, i.e., two disjunctive propositions of the form $a \vee \sim a$ (a or not-a). Thus, we may express the conjunction $(a \vee \sim a) \wedge (b \vee \sim b)$ equivalently as the tetrachotomy $(ab) \vee (a\sim b) \vee (\sim ab) \vee (\sim a\sim b)$. A tetrachotomy is a special case of the application of the distribution rule or “Principle of Distribution” for conjoining disjunctive propositions, this principle itself being a corollary of the axiom of replacement, which allows us, within the context of a proof, to replace any proposition with its logical equivalent. See Hurley 2000, 384–85, and Copi 1954, 34. It should be noted that this author’s four-way grid diagram of methodological orientations, as discussed and depicted in Sciabarra 2000 (152–54), is actually not a tetrachotomy, because the four viewpoints portrayed in the diagram are not mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive of the possibilities—an insight which is, indeed, a key aspect of Sciabarra’s thesis. More recently, however, this author has developed tetrachotomies involving the false dichotomies of dualism vs. monism and organicism vs. and atomism, and these diagrams will play a key illustrative role in the mind-body essay sequel to this one.

18. Indeed, some may even wish to argue not only that Nihilism does not constitute a “real” position, but also that Subjectivism and Intrinsicism, being erroneous, are not “real” positions either, and that the only “real” position is Objectivism. But as Rand (1963, 94) has argued cogently, this kind of approach to philosophizing, amounts to what she calls “the fallacy of the frozen abstraction,” an error “which consists of substituting one particular concrete [in this instance, Objectivism] for the wider abstract class to which it belongs.” It is surely a variant of this fallacy, one we might call “the fallacy of the disowned concrete,” to substitute nearly all of a group of particular concretes for (and omitting only one from) the wider abstract class to which they belong. For an extended discussion of this fallacy, see Bissell 1973. As for the complaints of “vacuousness” or “triviality,” it is interesting to note the exact same charges being leveled against Sciabarra’s thesis of

dialectics (2000, 146, 185–87). What is not clear is whether to regard this tendency among critics of innovative methodological proposals as alarming or reassuring or both.

19. Since consciousness, too, is an aspect of existence, an important implication of this clarified view of the intrinsic is that even consciousness, when not being the object of awareness (viz., introspection), is intrinsic—i.e., consciousness, too, when one is not being reflexively aware of it, is “an aspect of existence apart from its being held as the object of an act of consciousness.” That is, since any act of awareness must, at any given time, be either the object of introspection or not the object of introspection, it must also be either objective (viz., as defined below, ObjectiveE) or intrinsic. In general, and it will be important to bear this in mind in the discussion in Parts II and III of this essay, *everything* that exists, including consciousness, has both objective and intrinsic aspects. Thus, contra Peikoff (1991, 117), “strictly speaking,” the aspects of an existent that are the object of an act of awareness are objective; and the aspects of an existent that are not the object of an act of awareness are intrinsic. Existents *just are* either objective or intrinsic, in relation to a present or absent act of awareness that holds them as its object.

20. See Peikoff 1970, lectures 11 and 12.

21. It should be noted that Peikoff later (1972, lecture 12) abandons his view that the subjective exists on the perceptual level, holding instead that it exists only on the conceptual level as mistaken content obtained from a method departing from reality. For the same reason that I will reject, in Part III of this essay, Peikoff’s dismissal of the objective from the perceptual level, however, I also reject this unsupported narrowing of the concept of the subjective. Instead, I propose that we view the subjective as mistaken content obtained from any process, *whether volitional or automatic*, which departs from reality.

22. Against the objection that “objective” only properly or relevantly applies to consciousness (and volitional or conceptual-level consciousness, at that), it is worth noting, with the *Oxford English Dictionary*, that the original meaning of “objective” used by the Scholastics is: “being an object before the mind.” This point is discussed in more depth in Part II of this essay.

23. I will continue to use the terms “cognitive” and “existential” as modifiers of the objective, because they allow me to use the letters “C” and “E,” with their obvious suggestion of the “consciousness” and “existence” poles of cognition, and in order to avoid overusing the terms “epistemic” and “ontological,” or “epistemological” and “metaphysical,” which are their rough equivalents in this context. This will become particularly important in the discussion in Part II of this essay of the distinction between the notions of metaphysical and epistemological objectivity introduced in Rand 1965a.

24. There do not appear to have been any attempts, apart from Bissell 2003, to apply ObjectiveE to the ontological status of introspective data or the nature of mind and will—nor, apart from Peikoff 1970 (which Peikoff recanted in 1972, but which I endorse in Bissell 2003), to apply ObjectiveE to the ontological status of sense data.

25. This portion of the essay is based on Bissell 2006a. It has benefitted greatly from feedback offered by various discussants on the Rebirth of Reason website.

26. See, for instance, Ross 2001 and Philip Coates, who writes: “There is no

ontological objectivity or epistemic objectivity, there is only objectivity” (10 February 2006; <http://rebirthofreason.com/Forum/ArticleDiscussions/1648_1.shtml#31>). Coates is correct in this respect: in the primary sense of the term, “objectivity” refers to the one and only one *relationship* “between (a person engaging in) an act of cognitive awareness and the aspect of reality that it holds as its object.” See Note 13. However, in a secondary sense, the term is also often used to refer to the *relational attribute* taken on by both the aspect of reality and (especially) the act of awareness that enter into that relationship. It is for that reason that I have proposed, for clarity’s sake, the limiting of the term “objectivity” to the relationship itself and the alternative term “objective” for the relational attributes of the object and the act of awareness, viz., the existentially and cognitively objective. However, it should be underscored here that these secondary usages are just as legitimate and important as the primary usage Coates sees as the only proper one.

27. An implication of this pre-Kantian view of the subjective, as the nature of *anything* that exists apart from its being an object before the mind, is that not just conscious persons but also non-conscious things in the world are subjects and thus “subjective.” And as pointed out in Note 19 above, in Rand’s usage, “intrinsic” can refer to *anything* that exists, including consciousness, insofar as it is not the object of awareness. As a consequence, Rand’s concept of the “intrinsic,” once fully understood, can be seen as a complete stand-in for both the pre-Kantian notion of “subjective” and at least a partial stand-in for the post-Kantian notion of “objective.” In no small way, these shifts in usage have contributed to the “Tower of Babel” effect in discussions of intrinsic, objective, and subjective.

28. However, we should also be careful not to allow the problematic traditional “mind-independent” usage of “objective,” adopted in response to Kant’s thought, to obscure the fascinating respects in which Kant’s actual discussion parallels Rand’s IOS. As Pols (1992, 114) notes, Kant’s doctrine of the thing in itself was a kind of “minimal realism,” an acknowledgment that though “we cannot *know* these objects as things in themselves, we must yet be in position at least to *think* them as things in themselves; otherwise we should be landed in the absurd conclusion that there can be appearance without anything that appears” (Kant 1781/1791/1929, 27). He claims to have shown that there is a necessary distinction “between things as objects of experience and *those same things* as things in themselves” (27), “that the object is to be taken *in a twofold sense*, namely as appearance and as thing in itself” (28). This neatly parallels Rand’s trichotomy meanings of “objective” and “intrinsic.” Further, Kant distinguished experience in general (“outer sense” or perception and “inner experience” or introspection) from imagination, dreams, etc., saying that only the former “depends upon something permanent which is not in me, and consequently can be only in something outside me, to which I must regard myself as standing in relation” (35–36). Here we have the equivalent of Rand’s distinction between the “objective” and the “subjective.” As an anonymous reviewer succinctly put it: “On the issue of the trichotomy, Kant is arguably the closest forerunner of Rand, as much as it would pain her to think so.” Unlike Rand’s trichotomy, however, the proto-trichotomy we see in Kant’s system rests on epistemic quicksand, as a consequence of the fundamental flaw in his philosophy, his argument “that the structure of the mind determines the content of knowledge” (Sciabarra 2000, 57). A further crucial point of difference lies in the fact that, in Rand’s view, the form that content takes

is jointly determined by the nature of reality and the nature of the mind, while for Kant it seems to be determined exclusively by the structure of the mind.

29. See, for instance, Rand 1965a, as well as Rand 1957, 1040, and Rand 1960, 22.

30. For a brief while prior to 1972, Peikoff followed the same usage in regard to the ontological or “metaphysical” status of sense data. But apparently, once Rand had reorganized her thoughts about the objective around the methodological and ethical sense of “objective” (what I call ObjectiveC), pertaining to a mind volitionally adhering to reality, she then (as related in Peikoff 1987) persuaded him to stop calling sense data “objective,” on the grounds that because perception wasn’t volitional, it couldn’t be objective. I discuss this matter further in Part III of this essay.

31. See for instance Peikoff 1991 and Raibley 2002.

32. See Raibley 2002.

33. It might seem that an alternative, or perhaps even third, reason could be the fact that Rand’s “Objective Reality” usage strongly clashed with the sense of “objective” she wished to use with the IOS. As Raibley (2002, 42) notes: “[I]t would seem that she uses the word ‘objective’ to characterize two, different sorts of metaphysical status: (1) mind-independence, and (2) the product of a mind-reality interaction. Note that these sorts of metaphysical status are mutually exclusive. At the very least, this terminological choice would be too confusing to aid philosophical inquiry.” However, as shown above, the clash between these two metaphysical statuses is not as severe or complete as it might appear. Specifically, a product of awareness of reality (such as an idea or a proposition) may become the object of an act of introspection, and it is not thereby dependent for its existence upon *that* act of a mind.

34. I prefer to use the term “ontological” in reference to this specific issue, in order to reduce the amount of confusion that might otherwise result from multiple usages of the term “metaphysical.”

35. If so, then it is interesting to speculate that Rand’s later realization of this may be what led her to “correct” Peikoff’s application of the trichotomy to the issue of the ontological status of sense data, about which see below. In support of this view, Jilk cites Melway (2001), who suggests that Rand viewed the entities grasped by perception as being “metaphysical,” i.e., intrinsic, that “our direct perception perceives existent objects as a whole thing—which has mind-independent identity.” This equating of the metaphysical and the intrinsic follows Peikoff (1970), who said: “The intrinsic means that which exists metaphysically, that which is an inherent attribute of existence, quite apart from any relation to consciousness.” As we have discussed above, this must be understood as “quite apart from any relation to a *viewing* consciousness,” because even an act of consciousness that we *generate*, being something that exists, has inherent attributes that are distinct from those of which we are aware when we *view* (introspect) that act of consciousness, and these inherent attributes are the intrinsic aspect of that act of consciousness. Consciousness, too, is “metaphysical,” i.e., intrinsic, as is everything that exists, apart from its being the object of an act of awareness. Rather than abandoning the view that perception is objective, and that entities and consciousness are intrinsic, as Rand and Peikoff appear to have done, my approach in this essay has been to embrace it and to explore its implications for other issues such as mind-body and free will.

36. One might wonder why “intrinsic” and “subjective” could not still be used to label the two incorrect views of sense data, since those terms do not carry a reference to volition. However, Peikoff seems to have been constrained not to do so by the fact that he treats them, along with the “objective,” as an inseparable set of terms; once one of the terms is disallowed application in a particular context, the other two apparently must be disallowed as well.

37. Kelley, by contrast, at least recognizes a certain derivative usage of “objective” for perceptual-level phenomena. He writes (1996/2001): “Ayn Rand reserved the term ‘objective’ for phenomena at the conceptual level, for reasons that I consider valid but irrelevant here; so my extension of the term to cover the perceptual entity-in-a-form should be considered an analogy” (16). The irrelevance of Rand’s reasons for restricting the use of “objective” seems to be based on the fact that Rand was focusing on the cognitively objective nature of conscious *actions*, while Kelley is focusing on the existentially objective nature of perceptual *contents*.

38. Although we will assume, for the purpose of discussion, that Peikoff is correct in claiming that perception cannot depart from reality, it is precisely its resemblance to perception that leads a person suffering from a hallucination to believe that he is actually perceiving reality, when in fact he is instead undergoing a state of awareness that automatically departs from reality. If it is reasonable to regard a hallucination as a form of automatic departure from reality, it should be just as reasonable to regard normal perception as a form of automatic *adherence* to reality.

39. One is reminded here of Ambrose Bierce’s definition of “gentleman”: someone who knows how to play the saxophone and chooses not to. If one were not capable of playing the saxophone, then one’s not playing it would not qualify one as a gentleman. On this analogy, Peikoff is claiming that one’s awareness is objective only if one is capable of refraining from adherence to reality and chooses not to refrain. If, as is the case in perception, one is not capable of refraining from adherence to reality, but instead one must automatically adhere to reality, then one’s awareness is not objective. This essay rejects these Bierce-esque implications of Peikoff’s and Rand’s view of the objective.

40. We will set aside here the issue of whether there can be phenomena that exist apart from consciousness. It is customary to regard a phenomenon as something that appears to one’s awareness (especially one’s perceptual awareness), as against something existing apart from one’s awareness of it; but Peikoff appears to be using the term in a broader sense, perhaps as synonymous with “exists” or “things.” It is worth noting that Peikoff did not use seemingly contradictory locutions as “phenomena of existence apart from consciousness” in his earliest lectures (especially Peikoff 1970).

41. For one thing, as already noted, Kelley (1996/2001), author of a path-breaking Objectivist analysis of perception (Kelley 1986), has been reduced to saying that because “Ayn Rand reserved the term ‘objective’ for phenomena at the conceptual level,” it is only “by analogy” that we can refer to the content of perception, entity-in-a-form, as being “objective.” As we argue throughout this essay, it is past time to void that reservation.

42. As indicated in Note 13 above, Objectivists and others sometimes refer to the “objectivity” of one’s conscious actions or contents, but that word is less confusing if its use is restricted to the relationship between consciousness and

existence, using “objective” as a *relational attribute* to describe consciousness and existence themselves, insofar as they are the relata of that relation, viz., the valid act and real object of awareness.

43. See, for instance, Philip Coates, who writes: “[T]here are only three phenomena. There is the thing out there. There is the process of consciousness known as awareness. And there is the thing *as grasped by* consciousness [Rand’s formulation]. You want to create a fourth and a fifth ontological objectivity and epistemic objectivity—apparently dividing Rand’s formulation in two . . .” (10 February 2006; <http://rebirthofreason.com/Forum/ArticleDiscussions/1648_1.shtml#31>). Even in Rand’s own writings, the evidence weighs against this claim; she was not averse to drawing a distinction when the context called for it. In Rand 1965a, she clearly defines “metaphysical objectivity” and “epistemological objectivity,” as fundamental ways in which one can adhere to, or have respect for, the facts of reality. As such, she was distinguishing two facets of the virtue or character trait possessed by a person whose awareness habitually and deliberately holds reality as its object, i.e., is characteristically cognitively objective, in my sense. More importantly, in this context, see Notes 13, 26, and 42. It is not highly confused or overcomplicated to observe that Rand in 1965b broadens her conceptual framework and distinguishes two aspects of the “objective”: viz., in addition to continuing to regard an act of awareness rationally evaluating an aspect of reality as (cognitively) objective, she now also regards an aspect of reality in relation to man (i.e., to an act of man’s awareness that discovers it) as (existentially) objective. Again, these are *relational attributes* taken on by each of the two relata of the objectivity relationship. In following Rand’s nuanced discussion in 1965b, we are thus *not* multiplying entities or attributes beyond necessity, just identifying distinguishable aspects of the one complex relationship between knower and known.

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