

ON THE RANDIAN ARGUMENT



What are the moral foundations of capitalism? Many supporters of capitalism, especially among the very young, think that these foundations have already been provided; indeed that we already possess in the writings of Ayn Rand a demonstration, a proof, a cogent argument, an establishment of a moral view from which capitalism can easily be justified.

I have two reasons for wanting closely to examine the argument:

- (1) Some persons are not devoting thought to fundamental issues about morality, thinking that the essence of the job has already been done.
- (2) The argument itself is an attempt to provide a non-utilitarian-non-social-contract natural rights ethics.

Since I share the view that such a moral foundation is appropriate and possible and that laissez-faire capitalism is morally justifiable on such a basis, I wish to look closely at an actual attempt.

I would most like to set out the argument as a deductive argument and then examine the premisses. Unfortunately, it is not clear (to me) exactly what the argument is.¹ So we shall have to do some speculating about how steps might be filled in, and look at these ways. It may be, of course, that I have overlooked some *other* ways, which would make the

argument work. If so, I presume someone else, who claims to possess and understand the demonstration, will supply the missing material.

As I see it, there are four parts to the argument. (I use the roman numerals ambiguously to refer both to stages of the argument, and to the conclusions of the stages.)

- (I) To the conclusion that only living beings have values with a point.
- (II) From I, to the conclusion that life itself is a value to a living being which has it.
- (III) From II, to the conclusion that life, *as a rational person*, is a value to the person whose life it is.
- (IV) From III, to some principle about interpersonal behavior and rights and purposes.

I shall examine each of these in turn.

I

- (1) Only a living being is capable of choosing among alternative actions, or,
- (2) Only for a living being could there be any *point* to choosing among alternative actions, for
- (3) Only a living being can be injured, damaged, have its welfare diminished, etc., and
- (4) Any rational preference pattern will be connected with the things mentioned in (3), and since
- (5) Values establish a (rational) preference ordering among alternative action,

it follows that

- (6) Only a living being can have values, with some point to them. Values have a purpose *only* for living things.

To make this point fully clear, try to imagine an immortal, indestructible robot, an entity which moves and acts, but which cannot be affected by anything, which cannot be changed in any respect, which cannot be damaged, injured or destroyed. Such an entity would not be able to have any values; it would have nothing to gain or lose; it could not regard anything as *for* or *against* it, as serving or threatening its welfare, as fulfilling or frustrating its interests. It could have no interests and no goals. ("The Objectivist Ethics," p. 16.)

I do not wish here to enter into complicated issues about what particular cognitive and choice functions (if any) machines could be capable of performing. Does coming to know that some situation has been realized count as a machine's being "changed," in the requisite respect? Note the assumption that each of our values concerns how things affect *us*, a stronger assumption than that our values concern how some affectable being or other is affected. (Some views would claim to hold values unconnected with how *any* being is affected, e.g., religious views which hold that it's better if God is praised and worshipped, not because God is affected by this, but because it's a fitting or suitable response to him. Or views which maintain that it's better that talented and able people be respected and admired, even if they never learn of it and even if their knowing of it doesn't (seriously) affect them; and better not because of the effects on *us* of doing so, but because this is a fitting and appropriate response to other people's achievements.) Presumably then I can't value, or, in a valuing fashion, act to achieve some state of affairs, in a far-off place, knowing that I shall never know whether my act has actually succeeded or not, and knowing that in either case its consequences will not affect me. If there were an island somewhere where we couldn't go but could send things, and from which we would not be affected in any way, then, it seems, we could not value their being moral people and having just social arrangements, sending them copies of some book whose reading we think is morally instructive. Perhaps it is being claimed, not that each value in each instance must be connected with oneself being affected, but that, for a being to have values, *some* of them must be so connected. So that a being which *changed* so that it became immortal, indestructible, unable to be affected, and so on could not evaluate its alternatives and act so as to make probable the realization of some value it had previously held (e.g., the lessening of injustice in the world) knowing that (because of isolation) it would not know whether its act had succeeded. Or perhaps the claim is that though a being can continue to hold values in this state, if it was *always* in this state, and always had been, and always realized that it was, it couldn't hold values. It couldn't read, for example, *Atlas Shrugged* and become convinced by the arguments (we are not placing in doubt the machine's having certain cognitive capacity: so which part of the argument depends, for its persuasiveness, upon the *reader's* being vulnerable and having an affectable welfare?) and come to value and act so as to realize a world in which the ideals of that book are instantiated. But why couldn't it? *Must* it say, "What's all that *to me*?"

Issues about the centeredness of one's goals would repay further study (I take up some connected issues with some of the examples in section V), but I propose to proceed to see whether particular goals and values can be gotten out of (6) and a self-centered view of goals.²

II

From the considerations of the preceding section a conclusion is to be reached to the effect that the prolonging and maintaining of life is itself a value. Note, first, that it is unlikely that such a conclusion can be reached without the introduction of significant additional material. For suppose that *death* was a great value. (Suppose.) Only living beings could achieve it, strive for it, choose to reach it, striving for it would establish a preference ordering among alternative actions, and guide the choices of a living being. It seems that death's being a value is compatible with all that has been said in section I, and hence that the considerations of section I do not rule this out. One cannot reach the conclusion that life itself is a value merely by conjoining together many sentences containing the word "value" and "life" or "alive" and hoping that, by some process of association and mixture, this new connection will arise. There may be many other connections between *life* and *value*; the question is: what is the argument for the particular connection embodied in "Life itself is a value"?

Consider the following argument:

- (1) Having values is itself a value
- (2) A necessary condition for a value is a value
- (3) Life is a necessary condition for having values.

Therefore,

- (4) Life itself is a value.

But is (2) true? Are all necessary conditions for values, values themselves? If getting cured of cancer is a value, is getting cancer (which is a necessary condition for getting cured of it), or having (say) a particular virus act on one, a value? And why is having values itself a value? We might have the following argument for (1): Achieving values is valuable. We are not pre-programmed to achieve values. Therefore, if we are to achieve values more often than accidentally, we will have to choose actions which will do so, with doing so as their goal. But intentionally choosing actions to achieve things is *itself* having and acting on the ba-

sis of values, and therefore having and acting on the basis of values is itself valuable.

Note that this argument, in reaching its conclusion, itself seems to use (2) as a principle of inference. The argument also begs the question against death's being a value, for if it is, we are preprogrammed to achieve it. Perhaps, instead of (2) we would have (2'). If something is a necessary condition for (achieving) *all* other values (any other value) then it itself is a value.

Ignoring the issue of whether the question of death's being a value isn't thereby begged, is (2') true? (And let us pass over, for now, whether (2') is meant to rule out there being a situation in which dying is necessary in order to achieve one's legitimate values.) Because "not having yet achieved all values" is a necessary condition for achieving any given value, for achieving each value, is *it itself* a value? [We could also ask this question in extension, using a list of all values, if we had such a list.] Similarly, if on Miss Rand's account being vulnerable, destructible, mortal, is a necessary condition for achieving (and having) values, does it follow that this condition itself is a value?

We do best, in view of these difficulties, to consider another line of argument, which we might introduce by considering an objection to our earlier contemplation of the possibility of death's being a value. "How can death be a value? Value is judged against a standard of injury, harm, etc., and the greatest of these is death." (But on what basis, which we have been given, do we *know* that the greatest harm isn't the extension of life's experiences?) In an essay by someone who had been closely associated with Miss Rand, which may shed light on her intentions, we find "'should' is a concept that can have no intelligible meaning, if divorced from the concept *and value* of life."³ Here we have an example of some form of transcendental argument, so beloved by philosophers and so tricky to handle and get clear about. Before proceeding, we should have before us another aid, John Hospers's sympathetic presentation in his *Introduction to Philosophical Analysis* (second edition):

Suppose someone said, "Prove to me that life is valuable." Rand would hold that his request contains an inconsistency. It is, she holds, the existence and nature of life that sets the conditions for what is valuable; it is the distinctive nature of life that gives rise to the need for values. In saying this, one is saying much more than simply that man must be alive in order to pursue values: one is saying that man must pursue values in order to remain alive—and that this is the base of

ethics and of all questions of moral value. Just as (Rand would say) it is only the concept of life that gives rise to such concepts as health and disease—just as it would be meaningless to talk of health and disease except with reference to the standard and goal of life, and talk about health is meaningful only in that context—so it is meaningless to speak of values, of good and evil, except with reference to *the needs of a living organism*. The concept of value, Rand maintains, is genetically and epistemologically dependent on the concept of life, just as the concept of health and disease are genetically and epistemologically dependent upon the concept of life. Thus to say “Prove that it is morally obligatory to value life” is similar to saying “Prove that it is medically obligatory (that is, necessary for health) to value life.”

Here we have the claim that apart from a background where life is assumed as a value, no content can be given to “should”-statements and if life is assumed as a value, then content is given to “should,” namely (roughly) one should do those things which maintain and enhance one’s life. This account is of the form: you should do an act if it leads to the greatest realization of *X* (where *X* is the greatest value). Even if one were to accept this form of account,⁴ why must we substitute something about life for *X*? Cannot content be given to should-statements, by substituting “death” for *X*, or “the greatest happiness of the greatest number,” or any one of a vast number of other dimensions or possible goals? And wouldn’t such content enable “should”-statements to guide choices, apply only to living beings, etc.? Given this, it is puzzling why it is claimed that *only* against a background in which life is (assumed to be) a value, can “should”-statements be given a sense. It might of course, be argued that only against this background can “should”-statements be given their *correct* sense, but we have seen no argument for this claim. Others who find a goal-directed type of account of “should” illuminating, but who do not know what in particular to substitute for *X*, may have “should” with the content “leads to the greatest value,” leaving it as an open question what is the greatest value. These people, in asking “Should I do A?” would be asking “Does A lead to the greatest value (whatever that is)?” For these people, and those who substitute for *X* something other than *life*, an argument is needed to demonstrate that life is the greatest (or a) value. I do not see that such an argument has yet been offered.

III

Ignoring the difficulties discussed in section II, suppose that we have gotten, *somehow*, to the conclusion that for each individual, his life and the prolongation of it is a value for him. How do we get from here to:

- (III) For each man, the preservation and prolongation of his life, *qua man*, as a person, is a value for him.

Possibilities

(1) What man is, *qua man*, is completely determined by what's special to man (which is rationality). And what's special to beings should be preserved and should flourish. Why? Ignoring the dodo argument (*viz.*, it's a tragedy if any bit of diversity becomes extinct), we focus on the idea that what is special to a thing marks its function and from this we can get its peculiarly appropriate form of behavior. But no conclusion could depend, in this way, on some property *P* being special to man. For suppose it turned out that dolphins or some other being somewhere *also* had property *P*; would this stop the conclusion? It might be said that here we would discover a new kind of thing (*viz.* man *or* dolphin) and *P* would be special to *it*. But there might be nothing special to man, for all his nice properties might be had by other things which have further super-duper properties *Q* also, which man doesn't have. (Call these things, merely for a label, angels.) It might now be said that man (or dolphin) does have something special, namely *P* and not-*Q*. But how could one think that anything depended on its being *special*; that something of moral interest did not follow from

Man has *P*

in conjunction with other premisses, but did follow from these premisses conjoined with

Man has *P*, and nothing else has *P*?

Could discoveries on other planets show us that our fundamental moral conclusions don't follow? Surely, it's in virtue of man's *having P* that conclusions follow, and not because other beings don't have *P*. All this is not to deny that it is heuristically useful to focus on what is special to man. For if we don't apply moral standards and principles to the other beings we actually have encountered, and we do to man, then we can ask what properties man has in virtue of which moral principles

apply to him, in virtue of which he is a moral agent and a subject of moral judgments. Something fundamental to ethics does lie in those properties which do distinguish man from other things we have actually encountered, but nothing morally fundamental depends on the fact that these properties are distinguishing ones.

(2) What man is, *qua man*, is determined by his essence, which is rationality. He should act so as to continue his essence.

(a) If the essence mentioned in this argument is real essence, it's a dubious theory. Also, it (e.g., a man) would no longer exist if its essence changed (but another thing would), so that if its continued existence is a value, so is the continued existence of its essence. However, in the case of this argument, its essence doesn't *change*, it's just not exercised. The being continues to exist. And the conclusion of II is too frail a reed to hang such an argument on. For if it stops existing, another kind of value pursuer, *intimately* connected with it, will exist. And why should it care which does?

(b) If, in this argument, essence is those properties, relative to current knowledge, which underlie, systematize, account for etc. the rest of our general knowledge of such entities (those properties mentioned in our most fundamental, at the time, reducing unreduced theory about the entities, or if two different such theories, both sets of properties), then the injunction to preserve and exercise such properties requires reasons. Why shouldn't one *change*? Surely, it is not merely a conservative injunction. Two answers suggest themselves. One, it's change to a lower form of life, and so shouldn't be done. But one needs a theory to back this up, which isn't given, and secondly it implies that it *would* be all right, if possible, to change to a *higher* essence. Even though if one could and did change to an angel-like being, one wouldn't be preserving one's life *qua man*. The second, and more interesting answer, is that one won't survive (*period*), as alive, if one doesn't live *as a person*. This deserves consideration as a separate argument for III.

(3) If a person does not prolong his life as a rational being, he will not survive for long afterwards as any kind of living being. For, the argument runs, we have no automatic way of knowing what will prolong our lives. We have to figure this out, using our conceptual apparatus. And then we have to devise ways to do this. Otherwise, we will *not* survive at all, unless by accident, or unless some other rational being cares for us. And, if the goal is to prolong one's life (in years) and minimize, constantly, the probability of its ending, then, *much* knowledge, invention, etc. will be useful.

There remains the possibility of being a “ward,” making one decision to let another care for you, give you orders, etc. To this it might be objected that this might not work out (and you wouldn’t know when to desert the wardship before it begins to sink), and that such a life is parasitic and depends upon another person’s *not* living as you do.

There are two forms to the parasite argument, a consequential one and a formal one. The consequential argument is that being a parasite won’t work in the long run. Parasites will eventually run out of hosts, out of those to live off, imitate, steal from. (The novel, *Atlas Shrugged*, argues this view.) But in the short run, one can be a parasite and survive; even over a whole lifetime and many generations. And new hosts come along. So, if one is in a position to survive as a parasite, what reasons have been offered against it?

The formal argument is difficult to make precise, and difficult to fit into a Randian view. It holds that moral rules are applicable to everyone, so that if following certain rules and values can work only if *others* follow different ones, and can work only *because* others follow different ones, then the rules and values in question cannot be the correct ones. (“What if everybody did that?”)

But it is difficult to find the appropriate level to speak at, using this argument. My being a teacher succeeds only because other people do other things, e.g., grow food, make clothing. Similarly for the activities of each of these others. The question “What if everyone did that?” shouldn’t apply here, but how is the case to be marked off?

Intuitively, there is some description of what I’m doing (accepting a job to fill need, etc.) which is okay; that is, it is permissible for everyone to do *that*.

So, there being some description D_1 which fits what I do, where it would be disastrous if everyone did D_1 , doesn’t show I shouldn’t do it. For there may be another description D_2 which also fits what I do, and it would be all right if everyone did things of sort D_2 .

But we should not convert this fact into a condition which says that if there is *some* description which fits my activity which is such that it’s okay if everyone instantiates that description, then my activity is permissible. For this is too weak a sufficient condition for moral permissibility. Presumably some general descriptions of this sort would also fit the thief’s activity, e.g., “doing things which lead to their being fed.”

Here it might be suggested that the appropriate description is that which presents the essence of an action. But even if such a notion could

be clarified, as in (2b) above, its application here would beg the question, for especially important among the relevant general facts to be accounted for by the essence will be moral facts. Hence we must first agree about these moral facts before agreeing about the essence of an act, so that considerations about the essence of acts cannot come first as a basis on which to ground their moral nature.

My purpose here is not to pursue the details of how such generalization arguments might best be stated (there is a growing literature on the subject), but to note that if such arguments can be made to work, they will involve *extra* principles (and not merely the claim that a particular case of parasitism is doomed to fail). Some philosophers view providing the foundation for such principles, and stating them precisely, as one of the central tasks of moral philosophy, but it is one that has not even been attempted by Miss Rand.

One final way to get a *formal* principle should be mentioned. It might be said that a rational person follows *principles*, *general policies*, and so we must consider those principles of action which make man's survival possible. But it has not been shown why each person must follow the *same* principles, and why I may not, as a rational being, have a clause in mine which recommends parasitism under certain conditions.

IV

Supposing that it is granted that living as a rational being is, for each person, a value, how do we get to some *social* conclusion about people's rights?

The basic *social* principle of the objectivist ethics is that just as life is an end in itself, so each living human being is an end in himself, not the means to the ends or the welfare of others—and, therefore, that man must live for his own sake, neither sacrificing himself to others nor sacrificing others to himself. To live for his own sake means that *the achievement of his own happiness* is man's highest moral purpose.⁵

Starting with:

- (1) For each person, the living and prolongation of his own life is a value *for him*

to get to

- (2) No person should sacrifice his life for another
- we would need, in addition to (1)

- (1') For each person, the living and prolongation of his own life (as a rational being) is the *greatest value* for him.

[And: Each person *ought* to pursue his greatest value.] No argument has been offered, yet, for (1'). Miss Rand has some things to say about life being an *ultimate* value, which might lead her to accept (1'), but these things, in view of our earlier discussion in section II of life as a value, aren't sufficiently clear and forceful to establish (1').⁶

But suppose we have (1') and have gotten to (2). How do we go on to argue for the important *social* conclusion:

- (3) No person should sacrifice another person ('s life) to himself (his own).

Why shouldn't he? There is the parasite argument already considered: sacrificing another's life to your own is not in your own long-run interests. But this is no argument to convince (or apply to) someone living at a time before the victims have run out, e.g., the present. A more promising approach focuses on the notion of rights.

Consider the following argument.

- (4) Each person has a right to his own life, i.e., to be free to take the actions required by the nature of a rational being for the support, the furtherance, the fulfillment, and the enjoyment of his life.
 (5) Since each person has this right, to force a person to sacrifice his interests to your own violates this right.
 (6) One should not violate another's rights.

Therefore

- (7) One should not force another to sacrifice his interests for your own or that of yet another person.

But why does each person have a right to his life, to be free to perform those actions? If we grant, for the purposes of this argument, (1') above, and we add

- (8) Each person has a right to be free to pursue his greatest and highest value,

then we get (4) above. But (8) is surely too strong: did Hitler have a right to pursue his highest value? (But, it will be said, his highest value wasn't a rational value. So let us focus instead on "should.") Perhaps instead the argument for (4) is as follows:

- (9a) For each person, he *should* pursue the maintenance of his life as a rational being.
- (9b) The "should" in (a) is and should be of more weight, for him, than all other "shoulds."
- (10a) Each person has a right to do what he should do.
- (10b) Each person has a right, which is non-overrideable, to do what he should (where this "should" has the most weight) do.

(9) is meant to follow from other considerations which we have examined in section II, and found inconclusive. What of (10)?

The force of "right" here is that others shouldn't intervene, using force, to prevent one from exercising it. The question is: why, given that you should do something, shouldn't I intervene to stop you?⁷

Perhaps one has a vision of a morally harmonious universe in which there are no irreconcilable conflicts of duty, of shoulds, and in which if you should do something, I shouldn't forcibly prevent you from doing it. But no conclusive arguments have been offered for such a vision. If one believes that ethics involves (something like) one dimension or weighted set of dimensions which is to be used to judge us and the world, so that all of our moral activity (the moral activity of each of us) is directed toward improving (maximizing) the world's score on this dimension, then it will be natural to fall into such a vision. But if we legitimately have separate goals, and there are independent sources of moral commitment, then there is the possibility of an objective conflict of shoulds. So that perhaps, with some slight modification of Sophocles' characters, Antigone should bury her brother and Creon should forbid and prevent this burial.⁸

But Miss Rand needs something even stronger, for her argument, than objective harmony of "shoulds"; she needs an objective harmony of interests.⁹

What I shall call *the optimistic tradition* holds that there are no objective conflicts of interest among persons. Plato, in the *Republic*, being the most notable early exponent of this view, we might appropriately call it the *Platonic tradition* in ethics.¹⁰ Miss Rand falls in this optimistic or Platonic tradition in ethics, believing that there are no objective conflicts of interest among persons, and that there is no situation in which it is in one person's interests to force another to do something which it is not in his interests to do; no situation where one person's forcibly stopping another from advancing his interests, advances his own interests. No knock-down argument has been offered for this thesis,¹¹ and Miss

Rand has not produced (or tried to produce) any reason why, if such conflicts *are* possible, I, in following my interests, should limit myself so as not to interfere forcibly in your pursuit of your life as a rational being.

Miss Rand's position is a constrained egoism; egoism subject to the constraint of not violating certain conditions (which are other persons' rights).¹² One way to argue for constrained egoism is to argue that it is identical with egoism, to argue that the constraints add nothing because they are in your *rightly understood* interests (the optimistic tradition). If such arguments equating the egoism and the moral constraints fail, then a holder of this position will have to choose.

V

We have until now considered only *one* part of the social nonsacrifice principle (don't sacrifice another to yourself) and found the arguments for it inconclusive. We turn now to the other part of the principle: don't sacrifice yourself to another: live for your own sake. "To live for his own sake means that *the achievement of his own happiness* is man's highest moral purpose."

Is it? We have action, endorsed by Miss Rand, in the novel *Atlas Shrugged*, which appears incompatible with this. In the novel, John Galt risks his life to save that of Dagny Taggart, whom he loves, and he says that he will kill himself if she is tortured to make him talk. How can he do this? He says to Dagny Taggart: "It won't be an act of self-sacrifice. I do not care to live on their terms. I do not care to obey them and I do not care to see you enduring a drawn-out murder. There will be no values for me to seek after that—and I do not care to exist without values." But this is quite incredible. For it seems from this that, were Dagny Taggart tragically to suffer and die of some disease, then Galt would commit suicide. It would be a terrible loss, but does Galt "the perfect man," have so little moral fiber and resources that life would be intolerable for him *ever* afterwards (and would the agony of the time immediately after her death outweigh the life which could be led after time has done its work)? Would he come from Galt's Gulch to attempt to save her life, if he had the option of staying there, obeying no one else, and not being present to observe her murder?

Would Galt save Dagny Taggart's life, knowing that this will be at the cost of his own? Is *this* inconsistent with his principles? Would doing this mean he wasn't an egoist? A fruitless path to follow¹³ is to say

that it is the short period of happiness while he is sacrificing his life that justifies the whole thing. So that, in thinking about a situation in which both are unconscious and only one can be saved by a third party, he would prefer it were himself because in *that* situation he wouldn't get to feel the happiness of saving her life? Or are we to imagine that in *this* thinking about this situation he does prefer that her life be saved, and this because of the happiness he *now* gets in thinking about it?

But (a) we can imagine he's answering, quickly, a large number of questions on some psychological test, so that there's no time to pause for a glow of happiness. Is it now for the happiness he knows he'll feel *after* the test is over (mightn't he forget and not recall the question?) that he answers as he does?

(b) Why doesn't he feel sad in contemplating his dying and her surviving? To be sure, he may think it's better than *their* both dying, or *her* dying and his surviving, but why should the existence of some *worse* alternatives than alternative A make one happy in contemplating A? In fact, it doesn't, and we don't have this easy path to happiness.

(c) Most importantly, this answer gets things backwards. For one would be made happy by placing one's family in the only places in the raft¹⁴ only because one values their survival above one's own, *their* happiness above one's own.

It is not that one (chooses to) have these values, because knowing one has fulfilled them will make one happy. And it is not that I do it because not doing it will make me afterwards feel guilty. For this would be so only if there were some *other* moral reason to save their lives over one's own; it cannot be that the primary reason is to avoid later guilt. And also, we could imagine cases where the knowledge is expunged via a chemical producing selective forgetting.

Such science fiction possibilities cause difficulties. If one were concerned only with one's child's happiness, and one had the capability, one would implant a device to get the child to act on principles *P* (the correct moral principles) except in situations *S* (where he knows that deviating from them will be in his interests, e.g., by murdering someone and taking his fortune) where he will deviate from them, afterwards forgetting that he's done so. Such a person would be happier than one only following principles *P*, and his life will be identical to one with only principles *P*, except at a few selected times. Furthermore, he will think he always, with great integrity follows principles *P*, and he will have great self-esteem. And if someone were concerned only with his own happiness, he would wish that he himself had been so preprogrammed.

If one doesn't wish this for oneself, then one isn't concerned only with one's own happiness. Saying that one is so solely concerned but such a preprogrammed person can't be happy because he fakes reality begs the question (ignoring the fact that he doesn't fake it; it's faked for him); it *seems* as though one can describe a case where "rationality" (and rational self-awareness) and happiness diverge; where someone less rationally self-aware will be more happy. If in contemplating this case you would choose rational self-awareness and moral rectitude, rather than happiness, then the former have independent value and are not justified in your eyes *only* because they lead to happiness.

Driving the point further, suppose we read the biography of a man who *felt* happy, took pride in his work, family life, etc. But we also read that his children, secretly, despised him; his wife, secretly, scorned him having innumerable affairs; his work was a subject of ridicule among all others, who kept their opinion from him; *every* source of satisfaction in this man's life was built upon a falsehood, a deception. Do you, in reading about this man's life, think: "what a *wonderful* life. I wish I, or my children, could lead it"? And don't say that you wouldn't want to lead the life because all the deceptions and falsehoods might come out making the man unhappy. They *didn't*. Of course, it is difficult to imagine the others behaving appropriately, and the person himself not being nagged by doubts. But is *this* the ground of one's reaction? Was it a good life? Does it lack *happiness*?

This man lived a lie, though not one that he told. We can imagine other cases. You have what you believe is a private relationship with someone. However, unbeknownst to you, I am filming it with my super-duper camera and sound equipment, and distributing the film to people whom you will never encounter. Nothing in your life is changed by the fact that people are packing the pornographic movie theaters in Outer Mongolia to keep up with the latest serial installment in your life. So, should anyone care? And is the only ground on which my action can be criticized the nature of the viewers' experience?¹⁵

I have listed all these examples, not only to bring the reader to feel the inadequacy of Miss Rand's view,¹⁶ but for another purpose as well. For the examples we have discussed count against a more general view as well, which we might call *experiential ethics*. Put briefly, experiential ethical theories hold that the only facts relevant to moral assessments of actions are how these actions do, or are intended to, affect the experiences of various persons. The only morally relevant information (though other information may be relevant via being *evidence* for this

kind) is that about the distribution of experiences in society. Theories will differ about *which* experiences they pick out, or about the criterion of optimal distribution of experiences, but they will agree that *all* of the considerations have to do with such experiences, and how they feel from the inside. Indeed, it may seem, how *could* anything else matter other than the experiences people have, how things feel from the inside. What else could there be that's of any importance? It is a task of some interest to explain what else does matter, and why, and to account for the pull of the experiential picture on us.¹⁷

Let me, in closing, reiterate that my purpose has been to examine Miss Rand's arguments for her conclusions. It has *not* been to argue that death is a value, or that we should sacrifice others to ourselves, or that people don't have rights to our noninterference in their lives, or to demean the virtues of rationality, honesty, integrity, productiveness, pride, independence, justice. It has been to see whether, in her published work, Miss Rand indeed objectively establishes her conclusions. She doesn't.