

sure, which he receives from men he can respect. The mystic parasites who have, throughout the ages, reviled the traders and held them in contempt, while honoring the beggars and the looters, have known the secret motive of their sneers: a trader is the entity they dread—a man of justice.

"Do you ask what moral obligation I owe to my fellow men? None—except the obligation I owe to myself, to material objects and to all of existence: rationality. I deal with men as my nature and theirs demands: by means of reason. I seek or desire nothing from them except such relations as they care to enter of their own voluntary choice. It is only with their mind that I can deal and only for my own self-interest, when they see that my interest coincides with theirs. When they don't, I enter no relationship; I let dissenters go their way and I do not swerve from mine. I win by means of nothing but logic and I surrender to nothing but logic. I do not surrender my reason or deal with men who surrender theirs. I have nothing to gain from fools or cowards; I have no benefits to seek from human vices: from stupidity, dishonesty or fear. The only value men can offer me is the work of their mind. When I disagree with a rational man, I let reality be our final arbiter; if I am right, he will learn; if I am wrong, I will; one of us will win, but both will profit.

"Whatever may be open to disagreement, there is one act of evil that may not, the act that no man may commit against others and no man may sanction or forgive. So long as men desire to live together, no man may *initiate*—do you hear me? no man may *start*—the use of physical force against others.

"To interpose the threat of physical destruction between a man and his perception of reality, is to negate and paralyze his means of survival; to force him to act against his own judgment, is like forcing him to act against his own sight. Whoever, to whatever purpose or extent, initiates the use of force, is a killer acting on the premise of death in a manner wider than murder: the premise of destroying man's capacity to live.

"Do not open your mouth to tell me that your mind has convinced you of your right to force my mind. Force and mind are opposites. morality ends where a gun begins. When you declare that men are irrational animals and propose to treat them as such, you define thereby your own character and can no longer claim the sanction of reason—as no advocate of contradictions can claim it. There can be no 'right' to destroy the source of rights, the only means of judging right and wrong: the mind.

"To force a man to drop his own mind and to accept your will as a substitute, with a gun in place of a syllogism, with terror in place of proof, and death as the final argument—is to attempt to exist in defiance of reality. Reality demands of man that he act for his own rational interest; your gun demands of him that he act against it. Reality threatens man with death if he does not act on his rational judgment; you threaten him with death if he does. You place him into a world where the price of his life is the surrender of all the virtues required by life—and death by a process of gradual destruction is all that you

and your system will achieve, when death is made to be the ruling power, the winning argument in a society of men.

"Be it a highwayman who confronts a traveler with the ultimatum: 'Your money or your life,' or a politician who confronts a country with the ultimatum: 'Your children's education or your life,' the meaning of that ultimatum is: 'Your mind or your life'—and neither is possible to man without the other.

"If there are degrees of evil, it is hard to say who is the more contemptible: the brute who assumes the right to force the mind of others or the moral degenerate who grants to others the right to force his mind. *That* is the moral absolute one does not leave open to debate. I do not grant the terms of reason to men who propose to deprive me of reason. I do not enter discussions with neighbors who think they can forbid me to think. I do not place my moral sanction upon a murderer's wish to kill me. When a man attempts to deal with me by force, I answer him—by force.

"It is only as retaliation that force may be used and only against the man who starts its use. No, I do not share his evil or sink to his concept of morality: I merely grant him his choice, destruction, the only destruction he had the right to choose: his own. He uses force to seize a value; I use it only to destroy destruction. A holdup man seeks to gain wealth by killing me; I do not grow richer by killing a holdup man. I seek no values by means of evil, nor do I surrender my values to evil.

"In the name of all the producers who had kept you alive and received your death ultimatums in payment, I now answer you with a single ultimatum of our own: Our work or your guns. You can choose either; you can't have both. We do not initiate the use of force against others or submit to force at their hands. If you desire ever again to live in an industrial society, it will be on *our* moral terms. Our terms and our motive power are the antithesis of yours. You have been using fear as your weapon and have been bringing death to man as his punishment for rejecting your morality. We offer him life as his reward for accepting ours.

"You who are worshippers of the zero—you have never discovered that achieving life is not the equivalent of avoiding death. Joy is not 'the absence of pain,' intelligence is not 'the absence of stupidity,' light is not 'the absence of darkness,' an entity is not 'the absence of a nonentity.' Building is not done by abstaining from demolition; centuries of sitting and waiting in such abstinence will not raise one single girder for you to abstain from demolishing—and now you can no longer say to me, the builder: 'Produce, and feed us in exchange for our *not* destroying your production.' I am answering in the name of all your victims: Perish with and in your own void. Existence is not a negation of negatives. Evil, not value, is an absence and a negation, evil is impotent and has no power but that which we let it extort from us. Perish, because we have learned that a zero cannot hold a mortgage over life.

"You seek escape from pain. We seek the achievement of happiness. You exist for the sake of avoiding punishment. We exist for the sake of earning rewards. Threats will not make us function; fear