Integration and Unity in Randian Ethics

[Chris Cathcart, 2005]

I. Overview

Ayn Rand's philosophy is a remarkable engine of integration, so radical in its approach to such as to be subject to much misinterpretation. My task here is to apply Miss Rand's methodology to a number of key issues in philosophy, moral philosophy in particular. While I tend to be averse to buzzword-mongering and terminological pigeonholing, my approach is, properly understood, dialectical. Those amongst us hip to dialectical understanding of Rand's ideas mean simply adherence to proper methodology: context-keeping, integration, and, in polemical mode, dichotomy-razing.**[1]**

The key topics I address here are often cast in philosophical literature in terms of *opposition*, i.e., of opposition between seemingly disconnected tenets posed in irreconcilable terms. A famous proposed opposition that Rand neither took for granted nor accepted is the analytic-synthetic dichotomy (and its variants) – a purported opposition between two kinds of statements supposedly reflecting an unbridgeable split. Such splits are foreign to Rand's entire approach to ideas; they represent a fundamental error in the very approaches many philosophers take to their subjects. Properly placed *in context*, distinctions between kinds of statements do not represent splits *in reality*. Analytic statements show what follows from the *definition* of a single concept, but this does not suffice for us to treat them as in some kind of opposition to synthetic statements where two or more seemingly disconnected concepts are then united. For instance, although *rational animal* is the definition of "man," some things not stated in the definition are still necessarily true of and integral to the concept of "man." The concepts of rationality and animality presuppose a wider conceptual context; the concept of animality is conceptually dependent upon the concept of living thing, and so on with wider concepts. To treat single concepts and propositions as isolated from the rest of our knowledge is a fundamental error; that is to say, it's an error to treat single aspects of reality as isolated from the rest of reality.

My task here is to apply this basic idea to various purported oppositions in ethics: "is/ought," "means/ends," "survive/flourish," "value/obligation," "individual/social," "liberty/property," and "good/right." In doing so I outline an ethics fundamentally similar to Ayn Rand's (I speak only for myself, of course); I also incorporate the insights of other neo-Randian and neo-Aristotelian thinkers such as Eric Mack, Douglas Rasmussen and Douglas Den Uyl, and Murray N. Rothbard. True to integrative form, not only do I show that these thinkers taken together advocate a unified understanding and approach to ethics, but I also present theses that all philosophers (Aristotelian and non-Aristotelian alike) should accept, and encourage non-Aristotelians to drop tenets not fitting into this project. Similarities to the dreaded Immanuel Kant, for instance, can be noted with the caveat that proper integrative method yields major departures from the content and method of his own system.

My basic point is that while concepts are humans' means of dealing mentally with reality, our mapping must not be mistaken for the territory itself. We can mentally abstract an entity's characteristics but *in reality*, no splits between entities and their (essential *or* non-essential) characteristics exist. In mapping reality we must keep this context in mind and perform proper integrations accordingly. This insight into the nature of integration plays a central and crucial role in formulating a rational ethics.

II. Meta-Ethics: *Is* and *Ought*

The metaphysical locus of the bridge between "is" and "ought" is man, the volitional animal. This observation contains the germ of every concept within a rational ethics; it answers the most hierarchically basic and the most derivative moral questions. The fact of what human beings *are* gives rise to answers to, "Do we require a code of values to guide us, and if so, what does that code direct us to do?" We can, not inappropriately, sum up the objective basis for ethics ever-so-briefly as: This is the law of identity applied to human beings. *In reality*, there are no splits, divisions, or dichotomies; what man *is* generates all we need to know about what he *ought* to do. This also means: when formulating an ethical theory, the entire context – i.e., reality – needs to be kept.

Take a standard statement of the supposed "is-ought" dichotomy: From purely descriptive, non-normative premises, we cannot derive normative conclusions. That seems like a most reasonable statement of the matter; indeed, the law of non-contradiction demands its acceptance. If we lay out premises containing X, then we cannot draw non-X in the conclusion. That's all fine and good, for any and all descriptive statements. Note, however, what this does *not* say: that non-normative descriptive statements are the only descriptive statements. But if there are normative descriptive statements, then they state at once an "is" *and* an "ought." "Pure" descriptiveness is a misnomer: a normative descriptive statement is just as "purely" descriptive as any non-normative descriptive statement. So our standard statement of the "is-ought dichotomy" above is tautological: it doesn't establish the non-existence of normative "is" claims.

To illustrate by way of example, take the descriptive statement (whether or not it contains normative import is subject to ethical inquiry): The Nazis killed millions of Jews. That's a statement of fact, about a (past) state of the world. No amount of cognitive activity, pursuant to normative or any other kind of reasoning, can ever alter it. It simply is. Now, we can *also* apply normative standards to that activity: we can say that the Nazis ought not have done that; indeed, their actions were objectively wrong. If the nature of this dual identification is what the "is-ought" distinction amounts to, then that is fine but now uninteresting. Facts, once actualized, are what can't be altered; humans possess freedom of action and can be morally evaluated on that basis. Human freedom makes actualization of *future* facts open to choice. This freedom is the locus of the unity of *is* and *ought*, i.e., humans *ought* to actualize certain facts.

Further, while a fact is a state of the world, a description is a *conceptual identification* of fact. When we make conceptual identifications of fact, we are *at once* noting the unalterable character of the fact, *and* are capable of identifying the objective rightness or wrongness of actions that produced the fact. How is this possible? *By keeping context*. Taking the statement "The Nazis killed millions of Jews" *in isolation* from the rest of our knowledge, in isolation from all the other facts that give rise to our conceptual awareness of the wrongness of such killing, we might conclude erroneously that this descriptive statement contains no normative implications. *In reality* there is no such isolation. In full context, some facts of reality *give rise to* normative judgments even if isolated statements of fact by themselves don't express normative judgments. Fact-value unity inheres in reality; our conceptual identifications *abstracting* value-significance from fact do not represent an actual, real split.

This foregoing analysis isn't merely one of meta-ethics; it has a generally epistemological character. Conceptual identification is a process of differentiating and integrating sense data. By practical necessity, a method of conceptual identification involves abstraction – of mentally isolating certain aspects of reality from the rest of our field of awareness. That the true is the whole does not mean that we carry every single item of that whole in any instance of thought. At the same time,

however, mentally isolating aspects of reality does not mean *disregarding* the relation between one aspect and others to which it is connected in reality. Indeed, isolation is not done in isolation, because conceptual processing involves differentiation *and* integration. If measurement-omission is the key to objective concept formation, as Ayn Rand ([1967] 1990) argued, then we rightfully understand that omitting measurements does not mean subsequently disregarding them as if they never existed. Rather, it means maintaining respect for the context in which measurement arose and was made possible.

Just as the aforementioned methodological advice is key to sweeping away common yet erroneous understandings of the "is-ought" distinction, it also serves to sweep away similarly erroneous understandings of "analytic-synthetic," "necessary-contingent," and so forth. If there are valid understandings of these distinctions, they are valid only in virtue of keeping context, of noting that *in reality* there are no dichotomies, and that (context-keeping!) distinctions arise only pursuant to a cognitive being's need for conceptual ordering. Inasmuch as the study of, say, economics is "value-free," we rightly understand this in context; economics pursues lines of inquiry abstracting from the normative-value-rich character of human action without actually disregarding it.

II.a. Science and Values

At this point Murray N. Rothbard's contributions should be recognized for their integrative sensibility.**[2]** Rothbard, student of Austrian economics dean Ludwig von Mises and one-time associate of Ayn Rand's, sought to unite Mises' economics with Aristotelian-Thomist philosophy into an over-arching "science of liberty." Understood in proper context: while naturalist Aristotelian methodology easily lends itself to characterizations as a philosophical equivalent of scientific method – apt characterizations given the very *practical* value of science for human life – we must acknowledge the proper scope and application of scientific method. Human beings are, after all, unlike the rest of nature in having freedom of choice; as such, we cannot predict or test their behavior by conventional empirical scientific methods. The subject matter of science in general is *entities*; the subject matter of philosophy proper is *us*, where the causality under analysis is *means-end* causality.

We must, therefore, avoid the trappings of *scientism* – the illicit extension of hard-scientific method to the study of all subjects, including (especially) man.**[3]** In studying man, we should proceed on unique methodological grounds appropriate to our subject. Mises (1949) and Rothbard (1957) called such methodology *apriorism* and deduced all of economic science from basic understanding of human nature. The scope and extent of economic knowledge is thereby rightfully constrained by what our understanding brings to the study of economic phenomena; in this field of inquiry, understanding is not built upon or drawn from complex historical phenomena where any number of countervailing factors, known or unknown, may be present for any given event. In this sense, apriorist methodology is non-empirical. While this is sound for economic methodology, Rothbard was careful to note that we can avoid the Kantian trappings of Mises' own apriorism by recognizing the laws of human action as laws of *reality*, not merely as laws or conditions of *thought*. And in acknowledging the distinct place of man in nature Rothbard spoke meaningfully of a *science of liberty*, the study of man the choosing being and, implicitly, of the rational grounds for the *rightness* of liberty.

III. Means and Ends

Having covered some basic methodological ground, we can proceed to basic factual material for ethical inquiry. And it is uncomplicated: we observe that human beings are volitional and function

by reason. We observe that humans have ends and employ means to attain them. (From this root material the entirety of economics blooms.) The means-end relation is the *normative* subset of cause-effect relations. We observe built into human end-seeking a conceptual mechanism gauging success (or degrees of success) or failure in achieving ends. Implicit here is a standard of value, of import, for humans who care about achieving their ends. This standard makes possible normative evaluation: Is it good? Is it bad? What do I do about it? This is why humans need a code of values to guide their actions. (It is worth noting here that "need" is a most apt term but has been subject to misunderstanding, usually over whether "need" is root material for ethical inquiry. In a sense it is, but I propose a more precise answer: As a matter of practical and conceptual *necessity*, humans require a code of values to govern their decision-making process; this flows simply and straightforwardly from the fact that they have ends in the face of alternatives.) From the fact of what a human *is* arises the fact of what a human *ought* to do. The purpose of ethical inquiry is to discover, given what humans are, the code of values appropriate to, indeed required of, their mode of existence, i.e., their mode of living. Success at living as a human being is the basic normative standard for judging human actions.

At this point I note that the above (admittedly bare) outline serves to sweep aside another false dichotomy in discussions on practical reasoning and moral inquiry: whether reason is employed only in selecting *means* to ends (a view traditionally attributed to David Hume), or whether reason is used in selecting ends themselves (a view attributed to Immanuel Kant). Many *JARS* readers should at once view this debate with skepticism given the chief participants named. (I might more or less seriously refer to a practical-reason debate between these two as: non-causality vs. duty.) What place does this debate have in light of our identification that human reason in its practical (ethical) employment is rightfully aimed at meeting the requirements for successful human living? If humans can adopt ends *or* means that frustrate their project of living well as humans, then we rightly conclude that ethical reasoning holds both means *and* ends up to scrutiny.

It is no secret that human beings can adopt all sorts of erroneous means in attempting to fulfill their ends, but of greater interest to me here is how humans can be mistaken in adopting certain ends. They can be mistaken because ends can frustrate the kind of living appropriate to the human mode of existence. Some ends frustrate the basic practical requirement of *rationality*. To express proper sensibility towards context-keeping and dichotomy-rejecting: the concept of rationality denotes at once both the human mode of survival *and* the mode of survival that a human ought to strive to attain to the utmost. Given what human beings are, we can say that rationality is both a *means* to, and *constitutive of*, living the good life. In further substance, living rationally consists in harmonious integration of one's selected ends – of living successfully along all the dimensions that one could live. Rationality might not dictate the specific content of ends, so much as the decision-making process for harmoniously integrating ends into a successful project of living.

To concretize: a person wants to lose weight because she values physical health. At the same time, she is physically lazy and likes junk food. Here is a conflict in ends that exercising the virtue of rationality would and should resolve.**[4]** Ethical theory says that you have an end, a value, and that virtue is the means of attaining that value. But an end is the raw material of ethical valuation; ethics doesn't begin by dictating which ends to adopt. What ethics does is to provide a code of conduct, a guide for action, in the light of the fact that you have ends (that you are the kind of being that has them). That is why ethics does not say, "adopt happiness as your end"; rather, happiness results from harmonious integration and achievement of one's ends. Will ethics dictate, via a chain of analysis, that you ought to adopt losing weight (if you are fat) as an end? That question could only be answered in the context of each individual's life. Arguably, most people should, but most do not also aspire to

be sumo wrestlers, which may be integral to actualizing some people's life potentialities.

IV. Rationality: Instrumental and Constitutive

We can now bring together a number of points on the role of rationality in human existence, which also bear directly on subsequent topics. First, we can see that exercising rationality has for human beings both an *instrumental* and a *constitutive* function; the two cannot be separated. The exercise of rationality is necessary to enact the proper means to one's ends and to harmoniously integrate them. At the same time, by the very same token, the exercise of rationality constitutes the human mode of functioning, i.e., human life is constituted by rationality. The ends human beings pursue can be and are widely diverse; however, true for *all* human beings is that exercising rationality is integral to the satisfaction and harmonious integration of their particular, unique ends. Stated differently: whatever each individual's *particular* ends, the proper end of *every* human being's activities is the exercise of rationality.

We can state this alternatively in terms of the *formal* and the *material* components of human living and functioning well. We express form-matter unity as follows: The *form* of human living is rationality; the matter or content of human living consists in each person's particular ends. In *all* instances of human living is the exercise of rationality; the *specific* manner in which any individual lives is determined by her selection of ends, her personality, tastes, interests, and so on. So an individual's adopting and satisfying a particular end can express *that* particular individual's living well without its having to express *every* individual's living well. We know, however, that common to *any* instance of human living well is the exercise of rationality.**[5]**

IV.a. Rationality and Animality, or Reason and Nature

We can now highlight and explain the key point of divergence between Randian (or Aristotelian) and Kantian ethics. In doing so succinctly I must, perhaps regrettably, engage in some vast simplification. Kant sought to ground morality in our rational nature. This is a good start, but in doing this he considered it necessary to abstract the animal part of our nature from our rational nature and treat of the latter only. Taking a cue from David Hume, Kant posited a split between what our sensible, empirical, passionate, animal nature tells us, and what reason tells us. This is illustrated most aptly by Hume's famous admission in the *Treatise of Human Nature* that he found a severe disconnect between the guidance of *nature* in his daily activities and what *reason* told him when he sat down to do philosophy.

Reflecting this split was Hume's view of reason's role in its practical employment: while our passionate, animal nature determines the content of our ends, reason can be used only in determining the proper means to our ends; reason is merely a slave to the passions. If we take Hume's split for granted and place ends beyond reason's scrutiny, we sense a tremendous challenge to moral objectivity. In response, Kant sought to ground morality in rationality by abstracting away from our empirical, passionate, and animal nature, i.e., from desire, inclination, and so forth. In *grounding* morality, our having a corporeal existence is, to Kant, an unimportant contingent fact, or worse, an inconvenient distraction. The grounds for morality must be sought instead in our rational nature alone, free from empirical, physical influences; we must abstract from the *content* of our ends so as to consider the *form* alone (our rationality) and derive moral laws therefrom.

For Kant, morality is not for rational *living* so much as for rational *willing*; the will, as the seat of moral activity, lays down its own laws according to formal requirements of rational willing, explained via the famous Categorical Imperative. Only after grounding morality in the requirements of rational willing can we then determine whether morality is connected with our physical lives as we are in fact constituted. From the moral perspective, the rational (will) is primary, and consideration of the empirical (inclination) subservient and derivative.

As implied in Section III, this is simply an inadequate conception of rationality's role in human existence. To provide a proper grounding and account of right action, we must supply and proceed upon an integrated picture of humanity, paying due respect to both our rational and animal natures. A Randian ethics defines right action as that which supports rational *living*, given how we are actually constituted as living beings. Our living is played out in the physical, empirical world in which each individual's "contingently" set ends have, via the proper analysis, moral import. Rationality provides the *form* of human living, i.e., it dictates what we as rational agents are entitled and obligated to do given that we do, *in fact*, have ends. As I continue to elaborate on the formal demands of rationality in living, it would only be proper to acknowledge that such demands reflect Kantian influence on moral theory correctly explained. But the form of human functioning is not, by itself, enough to ground ethics or to provide useful moral guidance.

IV.b. Survival and Flourishing

We can now answer another false dilemma as well as allay one neo-Randian's concerns about the employment of certain kinds of arguments in Rand-influenced literature. The supposed dilemma in question – the "survivalist" vs. "flourisher" debate – arose over how to properly interpret Ayn Rand's arguments for an objective foundation and standard of value.

In understanding ethics as a guide to rational *living*, Rand (1964) sought to identify the objective source of values in the nature of *life*. I trust that for my audience I needn't go into great detail on the arguments she presented, so I confine my discussion to the relevant points, namely: Since the concept "value" is grounded upon the concept "life," and the standard of value is identified in virtue of the alternatives a living entity faces (most significantly the alternative of life and death), the objective standard of value for any living thing is its own life.**[6]** The "survivalist" vs. "flourisher" debate centers around the meaning of the phrase, "*life* is the standard of value."

The "survivalist" interpretation focuses on the conditional nature of life in the face of the life-and-death alternative, and posits the *preservation of the organism's life* as the proper standard of value. The "flourisher" position seeks a more substantive or robust conception of the *kind* of life proper to the organism – namely, life characterized in terms of *living well* or of *well-being*. While I think that Rand's ethics is best characterized as an ethics of flourishing or *eudaemonia*, I do not regard that as in genuine opposition to the "survivalist" view properly stated. Applying her argument to the life of human beings: If we speak of preserving *one's life* as preserving *one's life as a human being*, we come to understand that the *human life* preserved is nothing less than life characterized by the exercise of rationality. Indeed, in her own writings, Rand spoke of the standard of value for human beings as *man's life qua man*, i.e., the kind of life characterized by the human mode of functioning. Applying the observations from the previous sections, we come (back) to the identification that human life is characterized by something more than merely the preservation of one's physical, biological existence; it is constituted by rationality.

We can now address and allay the concerns that Prof. Eric Mack (2003) raises about what he calls The Shuffle – a supposed shifting back and forth in Randian arguments between different

understandings of *man's life (qua man)* without explicit acknowledgment that such shuffling is taking place. While Prof. Mack does indeed raise some legitimate issues about Rand and certain of her admirers' rhetorical and argumentative techniques, I think he overlooks, at minimum, the *spirit* of Rand's arguments. In any case, applying an objective, context-keeping method leads to a properly integrated argument resembling what I present here.

What exactly is The Shuffle of which Mack speaks? It is the supposed shift back and forth between causal and conceptual understandings of the phrase "man's life (qua man)." Mack unpacks this distinction by pointing out (seemingly) distinct lines of argument in Rand's writings. We have, on one hand, the *causal* interpretation of "man's life" amounting, in essence, to: Adopting such and such means will *result* in achieving such and such an end, the end being along the lines of maintaining one's physical existence, living a long period of time, acquiring material wealth, experiencing pleasure, and a number of other earthly benefits. By being rational, productive, independent, honest, and so on, you will succeed in obtaining these benefits, whereas if you do not exercise these qualities of behavior, you will experience failure, suffering, death.

On the other hand, we have the *conceptual* interpretation of "man's living (qua man)," which involves conceptually refining the meaning of "man's life" to mean living a life of character, of virtue, of principle. By treating productivity, independence, honesty and so forth as worth adopting in their own right, as inherently constitutive of a good life (qua man), we understand that man's good can *never* be attained by being dishonest, unproductive, and so forth. Living according to virtue as a matter of principle just *means* what it is to live the good life qua man. This is opposed to the causal interpretation that treats rationality, productivity and honesty as *instrumentally* valuable in attaining the goods one seeks. Morality, on the causal interpretation, is deeply linked to numerical and strategic calculations of benefit and cost.

The problem, Mack claims, is that the causal interpretation is subject to counterexamples. A sufficiently calculating and prudent individual can live a long, seemingly happy, wealth-filled, pleasure-filled life by predating upon others' production. And, in fact, we see real-world examples of such predators. So, it turns out, there isn't a necessary connection after all between being productive and being wealthy. In fact, this observation seems to run both ways: a predator can amass a great deal of wealth while a productive individual, all careful calculating notwithstanding, experiences business failure or accumulates little money. Indeed, the heroic character Howard Roark could, conceivably, live his entire life as a manual laborer without seeing his designs made reality and his firm prosper. Roark seems like the impractical idealist, choosing a life of principled virtue even if it doesn't lead to worldly success.**[7]**

Mack does note Rand and her admirers' seemingly begrudging acknowledgment that some can manage to lead a life of predation upon others – but only that predation is made possible by others' production and (*counter-factually*) that excessive looting would spell their own destruction. And so, The Shuffle implicitly kicks in: such predators are not *truly* living qua man; they're living the life of a brute, a thug, a moocher, an unprincipled whim-worshiper – in other words, as someone unworthy of self-respect and incapable of looking in the mirror without loathing. This may be all well and good, Mack says, but this involves a rhetorical and argumentative shift (The Shuffle) away from the causal interpretation of "man's life" to a refined conception of it, without its practitioners acknowledging the shift so as to hold themselves to account for it. Are predators not living well because they don't live long and happy lives, and are *actually* destroying themselves? Or are they not living well because *true* human life takes "respectable" form? After all, man's life (qua man) involves more than staying alive, experiencing pleasure, obtaining wealth, and so forth. But The Shuffle's practitioners seem to want to leave this question hanging so as not to tackle the hard problem of real-world counterexamples

in light of Rand's grounding of virtue in the requirements of *living*. They would seem to prefer leaving unaddressed the problem for moral theory that some people advance their ends via predation while some principled, virtuous people see their ends frustrated.

Having covered the essential objection that Mack has to Rand's ethical writings, what can we say of this? What do we make of proposed counterexamples in light of Rand's identification that rationality and its other expressive virtues are essential to living qua man? The answer has to do with methodology. Specifically, it involves rejecting at root the proposed dichotomy between the *causal* and the *conceptual* understandings of "man's life (qua man)." The causal interpretation would have it that rationality has an observed empirical, instrumental connection to the attainment of one's ends but that, as a matter of fact, there can be and are counterexamples. The conceptual interpretation would have it that rationality is constitutive of living well but that no necessary causal connection between rationality and attaining life's goods exists. I think that, given her methodology, Rand would have rejected this split between different understandings of "man's life." That is, Mack's criticism approaches Randian arguments on grounds that she would not accept, creating conflicts that are really not there. Indeed, this conceptual-causal opposition is just one expression, akin to "analytic-synthetic" or "necessary-contingent," of a split between the empirical and the rational. Not that I'm accusing Mack himself of illicitly adopting this dichotomy in any of its variations; for all I can tell, he's accusing Rand of implicitly adopting it and thereby advancing bad arguments. But this fails to take adequately into account Rand's steadfast methodological orientation in rejecting these splits.

I see nowhere in Mack's criticism his actually opposing the "move" towards the refined conception of man's life qua man (and understandably so, since he adopts that conception himself); he focuses his disapproval, rather, on those who allegedly make the "move" but don't hold themselves to account for doing so. While this is a valid stylistic criticism, I see little substantive import. Rand's focus on man's life *qua man* is clear enough in her writings; moreover, she did not present her conception of virtue in consequentialist terms, with presumed omniscience that certain specific results will follow from practicing virtue. Also, why describe as "begrudging" her acknowledgment that a looter and thug can survive? There need be nothing begrudging about stating facts of reality; indeed, any and all (useful) identifications of fact should be welcomed. Mack suggests that Rand and her admirers prefer to shy away from this, to deflect attention onto what they really mean by "man's life qua man." This mis-characterizes the supposed "begrudging" identification of fact. I take such identification to mean, "Lest you misunderstand what I mean by man's life qua man, it does not mean physical survival at the animal level, but a life characterized by the full practice of rationality." At this point, the appropriate conceptual-causal integration falls into place; note also at work the Randian-Aristotelian concept of causation and its factual-normative integration: for humans, living rationality just means acting according to their identity.

V. Value and Obligation

Yet another debate in neo-Randian circles concerns the grounds of value and of obligation, centering around the supposedly pre-moral "choice to live." But more background is in order.

Ayn Rand's most essential ethical writings are contained in two essays, "The Objectivist Ethics" (1964) and "Causality Versus Duty." ([1970] 1982) The first has a mostly expository and partly polemical quality, the latter mostly polemical and partly expository. In keeping full context, neither essay should be taken in isolation from the other, since taken together they so well express her integrative method. In "The Objectivist Ethics," Rand set out to identify an *objective* basis for values

contra subjectivism or irrationalism, and located this objective basis in the conditional nature of life. Given life's conditional nature, an organism's standard of value is its own life, i.e., the conditions necessary for maintaining, preserving, and furthering its life. For man, whose choices are open to evaluation by this standard, "man's life as man's standard of value" is understood as the requirements for maintaining, preserving and furthering his life as a *rational* being.

Rand expanded on this by developing a theory of virtue, where virtues are manifestations and expressions of the fundamental virtue, rationality. Man is subject to objective ethical evaluation according to the requirements, the demands, of rationality. That this is *required* or *demanded* of man is the basis for calling her ethics objective: man ought to fulfill this requirement on grounds other than his simply feeling like doing so, or contra the notion that no grounds exist at all.

It is common in mainstream ethical theory to interpret *must, required, demanded,* and similar words in terms of a categorical imperative. Dispelling common (mis)understandings of this is the reason for "Causality Versus Duty." After answering the *subjectivists* in her first essay, Rand turned to answer the *intrinsicists*, self-styled advocates of moral objectivism who posit *oughts* as commands issued as though from another dimension, beyond man's earthly inclinations, desires, and interests. She indicted Immanuel Kant as the arch-advocate of intrinsicism. In wiping out the ethical import of inclination or desire and subjecting man to unchosen *duties*, Kant, she claimed, severed morality from the practical requirements of life and the means-end relation, commanding man to blindly obey the commands of duty simply because he must. We now see *intrinsicism* as a false alternative to and flip-side of *subjectivism*; subjectivism holds that there are no *justifiable* practical requirements for man, while intrinsicism claims that there are no justifiable *practical* requirements for man. Still keeping in mind the arguments in "The Objectivist Ethics," Rand's objectivist alternative to intrinsicism stresses the role of man's choice, desires, and earthly inclinations in living the moral life.**[8]**

Rand's dichotomy-razing here is akin to that in Section IV concerning the proper roles of rationality and animality in human moral existence. With this in mind, we can address the alleged problem created by the "pre-moral" "choice to live." While Rand herself never used the term "pre-moral," some consider it part of an accurate interpretation of her anti-Kant arguments regarding the grounds for ethical obligation. In short: Absent the "choice to live," one undertakes no obligation; only in the *context* of this choice can moral theory provide guidance. Rightly understood, we see Rand's integrative approach once again at work here, applied to grounding obligation. It makes sense of the question, Does man's choice to live ground moral obligation, or *ought* man choose to engage in the enterprise of living given that life is the objective basis for values?

The false dilemma suggested here is answered simply and firmly with: Ethics provides man with a code of values appropriate to his proper functioning as the kind of being that he is. Further, the question, "(Why) should I choose to live?" bears the mark of self-defeat; ethics is an enterprise for *anyone* engaging in any kind of activity at all, including the very posing of that question. True to proper method, we treat this as we would any axiom of logic: anyone who tries to point out an axiom's "arbitrariness" is doomed to self-refutation. (What is their basis for using the term "arbitrary"?) Nor can the commitment to live be described as "non-moral," because *every* commitment is a moral one. Life *is* an objective value, but this identification is made *in context*. Morality is an inescapable feature of human existence; it arises from the fact that we *do* exist, that we face the necessity to choose *some* course of action, and that we require a guide for action on that basis. In systematic axiomatic fashion, the very enterprise of ethics is an application of the law of identity: what a man is, determines what he ought to do.**[9]**

VI. The Individual and the Social; Egoism and Rights

Moral theory is by necessity concerned with principles for living the life proper to a human being – how to live well and flourish. And, bringing in metaphysics and epistemology, we recognize that in reality there are only individuals. Human decision-making, and in turn human flourishing or living well, is an individuated enterprise. *Each person's own living well* is the rightful purpose of each person's decision-making; there is a statement of identity here: Each person's living well is something that only each person *can* do for herself. Human flourishing is self-directed activity. One person can't make it so that another lives well. (We will see in a moment, however, how one person can make it so that another does *not* live well.) One can adopt self-interested identification with the flourishing of someone else, insofar as one harmoniously integrates taking an interest in others' flourishing into one's framework of ends. My actions are justified, ultimately, by what makes my own life go well. This is the individualism in morality; it identifies oneself as the proper beneficiary of one's actions.**[10]** To perhaps adopt some rhetorical license, just as your thoughts and decision-making belong to you, so ought the benefits of such belong to you in action. This does, in fact, provide for a very nice transition to our next main line of moral inquiry: morality's social-institutional implementation.

My now-readily-apparent lack of patience for dichotomies applies in full force here. The dichotomy to raze here posits the supposed lack of connection between the individual and the social. Seeing as the enterprise of normativity is for prescribing proper norms of conduct, and we recognize in reality that there is a multiplicity of individuals who interact with one another, normativity applies here as an *extension* of the basic idea: What conduct is appropriate to rational human life? We observe that in social interaction people can and do "bump up" against one another; otherwise legitimate life-pursuit projects can seem to come into conflict. This provides the transition point between the personal and the specifically social guidelines for action.

Keeping in mind the earlier observation that the "raw material" of ethics doesn't inform us about the ends to adopt (even though ethics fleshed out in full does), an analogous observation applies to social interactions: human flourishing is an individuated project, and each person's projects carry ends that may or may not be of ethical merit. Whether or not a particular person's projects carry ethical merit *in terms of the requirements of that person's flourishing*, this is not crucial from the standpoint of specifically social norms. For all we know, everyone could adopt the best, most rational, projects. The important point is that for every individual there is a life-pursuit project of some kind going on, and each project being individuated, there is what I term a numerical incommensurableness amongst the set of project-pursuits, in the following sense. As implied at the start of Section IV, the good-for-Smith is not *the same as* the good-for-Jones. Each individual's good is determined through a process of rational deliberation and activity specific to her. I bring this up in order to clear away confusion that might stem from the observation that one person's *well-conceived* projects might bump up against another person's *ill-conceived* projects. From the *specifically* social standpoint, this is not important. For all we know, seeming conflicts involved in individual project-pursuers bumping up against each other could arise from (once again, seeming) conflicts between their *otherwise very well-conceived-and-implemented* respective projects.

The only specifically social upshot of the foregoing is this: Whatever the content of each person's particular ends, human flourishing is *constituted* by self-directed, self-generated activity; preserving the condition of *self-directedness or autonomy* for every individual is required of principles of social interaction. Depriving someone of autonomy (namely, by *physical aggression*) is something that one human being can do to another in the course of interaction that he is unjustified

in doing because: such aggression is contrary to the requirements of the human mode of living. We can take this, correctly, in two ways: It is contrary to the requirements of life proper to the prospective aggressor, *and* it is against the life of the aggression's victim. Taking the former identification first, it says: a project-pursuit involving aggression cannot be rationally integrated and harmonized into one's end-pursuits. A full explanation of this, in keeping full context, requires reference to the latter identification, which is the nub of the transition from the personal to the social.

A rational human being does not uphold contradictions in reasoning or attempt to enact them in reality. Applied here, it means: it is contradictory to uphold the moral worth of my life as a being whose mode of living requires rationality, and at the same time not recognize that, since self-directedness is essential to and constitutive of this mode of living, the moral worth of self-directedness entails a moral prohibition against others' violating my autonomy. Further, it would be a contradiction, and moreover a dropping of context,**[11]** not to recognize that the autonomy of others, who are just like me in this regard, is also similarly entitled to my respect. The practical rationality of rejecting contradictions entails my rationally endorsing the social condition necessary to preserve each person's autonomy: a prohibition on the initiation of physical force. Putting this another, very succinct, way: this is the law of identity applied in action, i.e., the only practically rational thing demanded of you is to treat yourself and others as what they *are*: as beings whose mode of existence is constituted by self-directed, freely-chosen rationality.**[12]** Suffice it to say that failure to acknowledge, in practical terms, things as they are is not conducive to human flourishing. What human beings *are* determines how one *ought* to act in regard to them. Once again, we come full circle on the relationship between *is* and *ought*, applied specifically to social interaction.

Finally, at the social-institutional level, the moral prohibition against physical aggression is expressed as the *right* of freedom from physical aggression. It is, quite succinctly, the right to live as a human being; this explains the whole of its various expressions, e.g., the right to life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, and the right of property, which merits its own commentary.

VII. The Intellectual and the Material: Property Rights

My discussion of property rights rests upon a fundamental idea: the unity of the intellectual and the material, the mental and the physical. On this basis, there is no rational ground for any dichotomy between private property rights and any other rights. The fundamental right, the right of autonomy as a necessary condition for living as a rational being, provides a moral safeguard for each individual's jurisdiction over her own life. In rights-theories often termed libertarian, this is often taken as equivalent to grounding the right of *self-ownership*. This right is often then used to ground a seemingly *derivative* right of property, i.e., a right of ownership over physical resources external to one's body. I would suggest that, thus stated, the grounding for property rights is not radical enough, for it does not sufficiently treat the right of property as just as integral to, and essential to, the fundamental right of autonomy as the right of self-ownership as usually stated.

The right of self-ownership is typically defined as the right to control *one's own body*. There is no dichotomy, after all, between oneself and one's body. (Indeed, this would be a way to rightly describe a right of self-ownership without running afoul of the argument that Kant, of all people, gave to the effect that to speak of the self as something that is both owner and owned is a category error, as if the self, as abstract disembodied agent, lacked a physical existence.**[13])** We can radicalize the concept of the right of self-ownership by recognizing it as a right of ownership or jurisdiction *over*

a physical domain. Why is the right of self-ownership typically defined as a right over one's body? Presumably it is because a person comes attached in some tautological sense to *his* own body. When I speak of *my* body, I can presumably get away with speaking in either a moral (I have a right over my body) or non-moral (I come attached to this body) sense and not be misleading. However, as the preceding sections already demonstrate, no sound basis exists for divorcing the moral ("ought") from the non-moral ("is") in describing the nature of human beings. Consider that we speak of a *dog's* or even of a *table's* legs, i.e., of their *having* legs, without moralizing this physical possession in terms of rights of ownership over their legs. So, given the necessarily moral sense of which we speak of self-ownership, it is improper to define it simply in terms of a natural physical attachment to one's body. In doing so we would unwittingly set up a false barrier between self-ownership and any other ownership. I submit that most talk of self-ownership tends to mislead because of this.

The fundamental right of autonomy, the right of each person's ownership over his own *life*, more accurately marks out the proper sphere of each person's ownership. Because life is inherently tied to *physical existence*, this right extends not merely to jurisdiction over one's body, but also to non-body physical resources. We can characterize all rights as rights of jurisdiction over physical resources. Stated alternatively, we can construe every right as *both* a "right of self-ownership" more accurately understood, *and* as a right of property over some physical resource. Now, it does happen from the physical standpoint that the initiation of force against someone's body necessarily deprives him of autonomy, and you cannot deprive a person of his body without taking his life, i.e., killing him. It is on *these* bases that the vast majority of mainstream moral and political philosophers tend to take the "right to life" and the "right to liberty" to be of fundamental importance, but stop short of granting the same status to the right of property, conceived as a right of ownership in non-body physical resources. You could, after all, deprive someone of their (non-body) property without killing them; you could, after all, deprive someone of their (non-body) property without depriving them of the use of their bodily capacities. So, ask mainstream theorists, why do libertarian theorists place such vital importance on property rights?

I think such a question relies upon a dropping of context. We were, after all, speaking of the *right to life*, in terms of rights of jurisdiction over physical resources. It is, in Rand's words, the right "to take all the actions required by the nature of a rational being for the support, the furtherance, the fulfillment and the enjoyment of [one's] own life." (1964, 93) The question posed, however, speaks not in moral terms of the *right* to life or the *right* of control of one's capacities, but instead in terms, simply, of life and control of one's own capacities.**[14]** But we see that the latter was never really what was at issue; we were, after all, speaking in necessarily *moral* terms about what it is for an individual to have jurisdiction over his own life. And it simply won't work to (*arbitrarily*) demarcate one aspect of physical existence, i.e., one's body, from the rest of physical existence as constitutive of this rightful jurisdiction. Morally speaking, the right of property in non-body resources is just as integral to the right to life as the right not to be deprived of bodily integrity. This makes perfect sense of Rand's claim that without property rights, no other rights are possible (1964, 94), and of Robert Nozick's describing (redistributive) taxation as *morally* on par with forced labor (1974, 169), despite the uninteresting observation that the taxed rich are not literally put into slave-labor camps.**[15]** To state the position and sum up: the right of property – in general terms, the right of control over (a demarcated set of) physical resources – is nothing other than the physical manifestation and implementation of the right to life. To deprive a person of her non-body property *is* to violate her right to life correctly understood.

VIII. The Good and the Right

I want, finally, to examine a neo-Randian defense of moral individualism, perhaps the most important elaboration upon her moral and political philosophy in the literature. It is precisely the importance of this work and the misunderstandings to which it can be and has been subjected that draws my interest. When he is not criticizing Rand's writings, Eric Mack (1993a, 1993b, 1995) lays out a positive case of his own for what he calls Moral Individualism – a doctrine that systematically develops the principle that each individual human being is a moral end-in-himself. I take it to be a drawn-out implication of a core Randian idea summarily expressed in John Galt's radio address: "By the grace of reality and the nature of life, man – every man – is an end in himself, he exists for his own sake, and the achievement of his own happiness is his highest moral purpose." (1957, 1014)

Mack presents Moral Individualism (hereafter MI) as a fusion of two components, Value Individualism (VI) and Rights Individualism (RI). He describes VI as MI's theory of the good, and RI as its theory of the right. What, more specifically, does this mean? VI centers around a conception of *value*, its being individualistic in virtue of *value-centered* reasons for action being agent-relative. RI centers around, in common parlance, *deontic restrictions* upon action, such restrictions being individualistic in virtue of their being correlative to each individual's *right* over her own life. The essential substance of these positions has already been advanced in this paper, to wit:

(1) Value being *agent-relative* and the reasons for acting based on value being agent-relative means that something's being good for Jones is a reason *for Jones* to promote or bring about that value even if that gives *no other agent* a reason for promoting Jones' good. The same holds for the good-for-Smith; Smith's good necessarily provides Smith with a reason to act without creating for Jones any obligation to bring about Smith's good. Stated another way, Jones is a moral end in himself: the justification for his actions arises from what would be good for himself and not what would be good for others. Jones exists for his own sake, for the achievement of his own happiness.

(2) Jones is the rightful owner of his own life, a right that Smith is obligated to respect; the obligation is mutual in that Jones is similarly obligated to Smith. Every individual has a rational basis, in virtue of her life being of ultimate value to her, for upholding the rightness of her autonomy over her own life, and of recognizing the same right in others. This provides the rational basis for a *restriction* upon each individual's actions correlative to the right of others: such a restriction, specifically a restriction upon certain kinds of *actions* affecting others' autonomy, does not specify restrictions upon the *values* one is entitled to pursue.**[16]** The only obligation this restriction imposes upon each person is of a *negative* sort: to respect the autonomy of others, not to contribute to others' good. And, by the same token, those others are not under an (unchosen) obligation to contribute to one's own good, and one has no right to force them to. Again, this reflects the basic idea that each individual is an end in herself, existing for her own sake.**[17]**

This sounds like a perfectly reasonable and accurate summary of a Randian view of individuals' moral status, but some clarification is inorder. Specifically, why seemingly divide moral reasoning into the realms of the *good* and of the *right*? Further, why characterize rights-correlative restrictions as *deontic*, seemingly contra Rand's criticism of Kantian morality?

Addressing the first question, I regard Mack's "division" of moral theory into that of the right and of the good as mutually-reinforcing perspectives on one and the same idea as expressed by Galt above. Treating the good and the right as genuinely separate realms of moral criteria sounds, yet

again, like the dichotomy-mongering that runs against the spirit of this paper. Both the good and the right are defined by reference to the requirements of rational living; both the good and the right consist in exercising our rationality. Putting the matter more usefully, I think Mack's distinction is that between what is of *value* to this or that agent, and what kinds of *actions* (means) one may or may not take in pursuing that value. Put *this* way, though, we can also recognize that right action consists of much more than simply respecting others' rights; it consists in practicing the virtues of character generally, i.e., in exercising our rational capacity in employing the proper means to our ends *and* in the harmonious integration of our ends into successful living. In both the personal and inter-personal realms, this both *entitles* us and *restricts* us in the kinds of actions we may undertake.**[18]** Speaking in terms of restrictions is not the only way to speak of right action. To sum up: traditional distinctions between the right and the good state that rightness is *constituted* by certain kinds of actions, whereas the good is defined by some desirable *end-state*. The argument I put forth defining the role of rationality in human existence readily makes sense of this distinction without posing a real split.**[19]**

As to the second question, why "deontology"? I see this as little more than a matter of preferred nomenclature; "deontology" is a buzzword, more or less, for ethical theories reflecting Kantian influence. A pure deontological theory like Kant's takes the right to be independent of, and prior to, the good. And it is true that the theory I've advanced here is similar to Kant's with respect to the *form* of moral judgments. Specifically, Kant set forth criteria that I consider essential to any respectable moral theory: a universalizability requirement (in short: it is irrational to seek to enact a contradiction), and a directive to treat human beings as ends in themselves and not solely as means to the ends of others.**[20]** The substance of these criteria has already been fleshed out here and the divergence from Kant's own formalism noted. It is unimportant at this point whether we call it deontology or schmeontology; of import is the substantive explanation concerning the formal requirements of rationality in moral deliberation.

IX. Conclusion

Rather than merely sum up and repeat what I've already said, I would like to raise a general point about Ayn Rand's methodology. In characterizing her philosophy as "a philosophy for living on earth" (the planned subtitle for her unwritten comprehensive non-fiction treatise), Rand quite literally identified the vital importance of philosophy to our existence. Philosophy is both of theoretical and of inherently *practical* importance. This informs Rand's entire methodology in application to any issue in philosophy, starting with metaphysics and epistemology. Applied to ethics, this methodological orientation is expressed in terms of ethics being a guide for living the life appropriate to us given our *identity* as rational beings. And, as this paper has helped to make clear, this methodological uniting of the theoretical and practical applies to every issue in ethical inquiry.

NOTES

1. See namely Sciabarra 1995, and the overall spirit of Peikoff [1967] 1990, 1983. Smith 1995 and (as I was pleased to discover after having composed this piece) Smith 2000 also mirror my approach significantly.

2. I do not specifically endorse Rothbard's positions on anarchism and government authority, nor would I particularly expect Objectivists to accept them.

3. Hayek's contributions to the critique of scientism and the implications for anti-statism (particularly [1952] 1979, [1976] 1985 and elsewhere throughout his works) are also worth noting.

4. An erroneous interpretation of "adopting an end" may lead some economists to declare that such a person hasn't presently adopted the end of losing weight. This interpretation is proposed on the basis that human beings have ends and employ the means in order to attain them. The identification, properly expanded, is: human beings are by their nature are capable of adopting ends and are capable of employing the means to attain them. We can say that this person was capable of adopting, and has adopted, the end of losing weight, and is capable of adopting the means, but has not adopted or has adopted in very lackluster fashion the means, of attaining that end. One can have rational grounds for doubting whether someone really has losing weight as an end if they do nothing towards achieving that aim. Only the person espousing that as an end is really in the position to know for sure. One could have losing weight as an end but only takes minimal steps in that direction. What the economist can determine, from the person's actions, is that her psychological investment in remaining lazy and eating junk food has outweighed, in practice, the stated commitment to losing weight. This is just a way of saying that there is a conflict amongst a person's stated ends, reflected in the person's actions (saying one wants to lose weight is, after all, an action). Another, alternative, interpretation of the economist's analysis is that what the person expresses is some *preference* for one result or other. I bring this up because at least one theory about practical reasons holds that desires for laziness and junk food may not be ends at all strictly speaking, but effects of the passions in conflict with rationally-set ends. Note I say "may." From the economist's standpoint, it shouldn't make any difference; one can have an expressed-in-action preference for laziness and junk food overriding or outweighing, in action, the expressed-in-words-only desire to lose weight.

5. Another, further, way of characterizing this distinction is that human life is characterized by the actualization of each person's *generic* as well as *individuative* potentialities. For this and other details see Rasmussen and Den Uyl 1991.

6. It is worth noting that Rand seemed most unfazed by what would trouble many philosophers: grounding value-theory in robustly empirical observation of living entities. What if the biological theory we appeal to turns out to be false in some crucial ways? True to form, Rand had little patience for such questions, posed merely in virtue of biological science being, in the common parlance, "empirical" and "contingent." In any case, I should note for the sake of accuracy that my own arguments pertain specifically to the nature and identity of human beings (a philosophical identification) and does not rely upon the biological claims (scientific propositions) that Rand made.

7. This is hardly a new issue in ethics; it goes back at least all the way to Plato's myth of the Ring of Gyges. This ring confers invisibility on its wearer, allowing him to get away with anything he feels like. He could rape and loot at will. An egoist in the traditional understanding would use this ring to advance his own interests in any manner he pleases, unconstrained by normative principles. Even under a more refined conception of "interests," meaning something more objective than acting on one's desires, and measured in terms of a bundle of things such as physical health, wealth, pleasure, fulfillment of long-range plans, having advantageous relationships with others, etc., it is thought that an egoist will nonetheless find some cases where it's in his best interests to violate moral norms. Is anyone so pure of soul that they would never use this ring to their own worldly advantage? Is the psychological appeal of belief in God – a Being to whom one is never invisible – fostered by the tradition of thought of which the Gyges myth is a part?

8. The intrinsicist conception of value stumbles where we seek motivation for acting morally. If, say, "life is the standard of value" were conceived intrinsically, it would command us to seek life whether we care about or have an active stake in pursuing life. A false, intrinsicist reading of Rand's theory of value would say that life is simply good, so therefore you ought to pursue it. But why should one care about this? What's the relation between this end and the things you actually seek? A subjectivist takes desire itself as conferring goodness, and leaves open just the sort of things that are permissibly desirable. The objectivist approach is to design a guide to action that safely steers between these false approaches, by tying obligation to value insofar as moral *prescriptions* go (thereby rejecting intrinsicism), without saying that morality's *grounds* are thereby desire-dependent (thereby avoiding subjectivism). The intrinsicist conception conflates these two points in speaking of *objective* goodness as "independent of desire." The intrinsicist's false hope is that for there to be

true morality, justification must come from *without*, i.e., from beyond considerations of our desires – otherwise, says the intrinsicist, we'd still be speaking only in terms of desire-satisfaction, not morality. The true objectivist position, however, grounds goodness in the objective (desire-independent) requirements of rational living, at the same time showing how rational living is necessary for a satisfactory framework of ends, of ends' satisfaction and harmonious integration, given that you do in fact already have ends that you seek to fulfill. The concept of virtue provides the objective bridge between the ends you do have and the appropriate way of living to satisfy them. Put another way, in Randian terminology: Intrinsicism embraces virtue while rejecting value; Subjectivism embraces value while rejecting virtue. Each side rips one aspect from the whole, the context that conditions the validity of both.

9. Rasmussen (2002) performs admirably in applying integrative, context-keeping sensibility to this issue, and while I think his position and mine come out more or less the same (I admit needing to think this through more), his orthodox Aristotelian commitments are stronger than mine, inasmuch as he invokes the notion of man's *natural end* to ground the proper function of human choice – i.e., that the proper end of man's choice is the choice to live. The concept of natural ends or natural teleology does not play an essential role in my own argument and Rand herself (1964) confined her specific comments on such to a single brief footnote. Any number of things (e.g., our being designed by evolution for inclusive fitness) could bring the concept and/or application of natural-end teleology into question that, as far as I am concerned, make their usefulness for ethical inquiry quite suspect, enough so that useful and interesting answers about value and obligation should and can be sought (and found) elsewhere. My own view, in regard to both natural ends and to the normative project in general, seems to accord closely with Robert Bass's (2005). Indeed, Rob's likely protestations notwithstanding, this may place his views inescapably within the neo-Randian tradition. Less controversially, it places his views well within the neo-Aristotelian tradition. A full explanation of what I find peculiar about natural ends is rather outside the scope of this paper, but my comments and wariness here were especially piqued by Mack's (2003) comments on the kind of life that we might consider appropriate to monkeys considering that they live longer in captivity. It raises conceptual challenges over whether monkeyness (qua monkey) is best served by keeping monkeys in zoos rather than leaving them in their natural state. It would not be prima facie "crazy" to claim that, on an appropriate conceptual rendering of "life qua monkey" (akin to the supposed conceptual recasting of human life as "man's life qua man"), monkeyness is better served by leaving them in their natural state with resulting shortened lifespan, worsened physical health, and so on. What seems taken for granted is that "life qua monkey" could be meaningfully, interestingly or usefully construed. If it could be, it would raise legitimate questions about whether, for instance, we ought to keep animals as pets. I believe that the conceptual waters would get murkier and the examples more bizarre if we proceed further. In any event, I propose that my own argument is more radical in its approach and avoids these problems: it rests not on dubious-sounding derivations from purported natural ends, but on our *identity* as rational, choosing, end-setting, living beings.

10. This is the reason for calling Randian ethics an *egoistic* moral theory (i.e., egoism is not a moral primary but, rather, is based on a rational conception of interests), and also bridges another apparent gap between Rand and neo-Aristotelians like Rothbard. It appears, based on extant writings, that Rothbard's chief disagreement with Rand in ethics was over her advocacy of egoism. See, for instance, Rothbard 1982, ch. 20, n. 5, where he speaks of egoism as "only one possible moral theory" in his natural-law ethical framework. Also, brief online excerpts from his mid-1950s journals (Stromberg 2000) appear to suggest that Rothbard diverged from Rand specifically over her egoistic adaptation of Aristotelian ethics, although not enough is provided to make it clear that this is how he believed at the time (1954) that Rand's own variant of Aristotelianism "is a horrible perversion of a sound system". But in light of the explanation just provided as to the individualism of moral theory, Rothbard would have been correct to embrace Randian individualism and egoism properly understood in accordance with his comprehensive science of liberty. Huemer (2002) raises legitimate but largely semantic issues about egoism in Rand's sense, and as I show in Section VIII, her conception of individualism entails nothing about "absolute, non-instrumental, non-agent-relative" *value* in grounding rights, where value is defined only in terms of promotion of *end-states*; rationality constraints can also dictate appropriate *means*.

11. The context-drop consists of dropping the identification that one is an individual among many, i.e., that what is true of oneself is true of all people. We are each instances of a class of which we form

generalizations; in full context, we argue from the general to the particular and vice versa. I thank Kent Christiansen (personal conversation) for first presenting the essence of this formulation to me as a response to the "prudent predator" argument in light of the principle that each individual is the rightful beneficiary of his own production.

12. To the best of my knowledge, this succinct formulation originates with humanities. philosophy.objectivism poster Jim Klein, not in any published literature of which I am aware. Jim, in turn, acknowledges credit to another h.p.o. poster, Greg Swann.

13. To be fair to the original claims that Kant made, I reproduce what he said, as quoted in Cohen 1995, 211: "Man cannot dispose over himself because he is not a thing; he is not his own property; to say that he is would be self-contradictory; for insofar as he is a person he is a Subject in whom the ownership of things can be vested, and if he were his own property, he would be a thing over which he could have ownership. But a person cannot be a property and so cannot be a thing which can be owned, for it is impossible to be a person and a thing, the proprietor and the property." (From *Lectures in Ethics*) I trust that the clarifications I provide in this section steer clear of such conceptual hurdles.

14. For this and related reasons, mainstream welfare-rights theories flounder where they should explain what about *humans* gives them rights. A dog, like humans, requires food and a great degree of control over its capacities in order to live as a dog. Why not, then, say that a dog has rights over these things? This is what happens when we drop the context underlying rights-talk. Indeed, some theorists seem to take this very leap and *do* argue for dogs' rights and who knows what else (plants' rights?). But setting rights-talk on proper grounding, we find that preserving the condition of self-directed rationality, and only this, is rights' purpose.

15. The specific source of this observation in the secondary Nozick literature escapes me at present, and perhaps it's just as well that the original author be spared the mention. I cannot resist asking: Is this the level of epistemological disintegration to which so much of contemporary philosophy has stooped?

16. Burgess-Jackson (2003) presents a conception of egoism defying standard categorization of egoism as a consequentialist moral theory. As he explains, egoism does not conceptually require such consequentalist notions as *maximization* of "the good." Nor, certainly, would the conception of egoism that I present require such. Burgess-Jackson notes, further, that his Deontological Egoism is "akin to, although not identical with" Mack's MI (366-7).

17. MI is also an expression of Rand's rejection of *sacrifice* in ethics: an individualist neither sacrifices himself to others, nor others to himself.

18. Burgess-Jackson (2003, 373) provides a useful pointer to the jurisdiction rationale of MI based on Mack's own discussion: his "concept of having jurisdiction (literally, law-declaring capacity) over oneself . . . incorporates not only *authority* (to promote one's interests), but also *independence* (of or from others), *responsibility* (to and for those to whom one has made commitments), and *boundaries* (against aggression)."

19. Rasmussen and Den Uyl (1991, ch. 2-3) make similar points specifying the teleological as well as deontological character of right action.

20. This raises perfectly legitimate questions about whether moral theories like utilitarianism are even minimally *respectable*.

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