

# Ayn Rand's Conception of Valuing

## Greg Salmieri

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1. "What Is Capitalism" on the objective (vs. subjectivist or intrinsic) theory of the good:

There are, in essence, three schools of thought on the nature of the good: the intrinsic, the subjective, and the objective. The *intrinsic* theory holds that the good is inherent in certain things or actions as such, regardless of their context and consequences, regardless of any benefit or injury they may cause to the actors and subjects involved. It is a theory that divorces the concept of "good" from beneficiaries, and the concept of "value" from valuer and purpose—claiming that the good is good in, by, and of itself.

The *subjectivist* theory holds that the good bears no relation to the facts of reality, that it is the product of a man's consciousness, created by his feelings, desires, "intuitions," or whims, and that it is merely an "arbitrary postulate" or an "emotional commitment."

The intrinsic theory holds that the good resides in some sort of reality, independent of man's consciousness; the subjectivist theory holds that the good resides in man's consciousness, independent of reality.

The *objective* theory holds that the good is neither an attribute of "things in themselves" nor of man's emotional states, but an *evaluation* of the facts of reality by man's consciousness according to a rational standard of value. (Rational, in this context, means: derived from the facts of reality and validated by a process of reason.) The objective theory holds that *the good is an aspect of reality in relation to man*—and that it must be discovered, not invented, by man. Fundamental to an objective theory of values is the question: Of value to whom and for what? An objective theory does not permit context-dropping or "concept-stealing"; it does not permit the separation of "value" from "purpose," of the good from beneficiaries, and of man's actions from reason.

(*Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*, 21–22, cf. *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand*, 209, on the presuppositions of the concept "value")

2. Roark to Wynand: "You own every structure you've stopped before and heard yourself answering. [ . . . ] What you feel in the presence of a thing you admire is just one word—'Yes.' The affirmation, the acceptance, the sign of admittance. And that "Yes" is more than an answer to one thing, it's a kind of 'Amen' to life, to the earth that holds this thing, to the thought that created it, to yourself for being able to see it. But the ability to say 'Yes' or 'No' is the essence of all ownership. It's your ownership of your own ego. Your soul, if you wish. Your soul has a single basic function—the act of valuing. 'Yes' or 'No,' 'I wish' or 'I do not wish.' You can't say 'Yes' without saying 'I.' There's no affirmation without the one who affirms. In this sense, everything to which you grant your love is yours."  
(*The Fountainhead*, 539)

3. *Little Street* notes (1928): [Most people] do not hold anything to be very serious or profound. There is nothing that is sacred or immensely important to them. There is nothing—no idea, object, work, or person—that can inspire them with a profound, intense, and all-absorbing passion that reaches to the roots of their souls. They do not know how to value or desire. They cannot give themselves entirely to anything. There is nothing *absolute* about them. They take all things lightly, easily, pleasantly—almost indifferently, in that they can have it or not, they do not claim it as their absolute necessity. (*Journals of Ayn Rand*, 28)
4. Wynand to Dominique: “I’ve never really wanted anything. Not in the total, undivided way, not with the kind of desire that becomes an ultimatum, ‘yes’ or ‘no,’ and one can’t accept the ‘no’ without ceasing to exist. [ . . . ] I’ve never felt that before. Dominique, I’ve never known how to say ‘mine’ about anything. Not in the sense I say it about you.” (*The Fountainhead*, 502)
5. Kira to Andrei: “Now look at me! Take a good look! I was born and I knew I was alive and I knew what I wanted. What do you think is [alive] <living> in me? Why do you think I’m alive? Because I have a stomach and eat and digest the food? Because I breathe and work and produce more food to digest? Or because I know what I want, and that something which knows how to want—isn’t that life itself? And who—in this damned[, endless] universe—who can tell me why I should live for anything but for that which I want? Who can answer that in human sounds that speak for human reason? [No one, not even you!] < . . . > But you’ve tried to tell us what we should want. You came as a solemn army to bring a new life to men. You tore that life you knew nothing about, [quivering,] out of their guts<—>and you told them what it had to be. You took their every hour, every minute, every nerve, every thought in the farthest corners of their souls[,]<—>and you told them what it had to be. You came and you forbade life to the living. You’ve driven us all into an iron cellar and you’ve closed all doors, and you’ve locked us airtight, airtight till the blood vessels of our spirits burst! Then you stare and wonder what it’s doing to us. Well, then, look! All of you who have eyes left—look!” (*We the Living*, 481/376)
6. Keating and Dominique:
- “You’re not real. You’re only a body. [...] You understand what death is? When a body can’t move any more, when it has no . . . no will, no meaning. You understand? Nothing. The absolute nothing. Well, your body moves—but that’s all. The other, the thing inside you, your—oh, don’t misunderstand me, I’m not talking religion, but there’s no other word for it, so I’ll say: your soul—your soul doesn’t exist. No will, no meaning. There’s no real *you* anymore.”
- “What’s the real me?” she asked. For the first time, she looked attentive; not compassionate; but, at least, attentive.
- “What’s the real anyone?” he said, encouraged. “It’s not just the body. It’s. . . It’s the soul.”
- “What is the soul?”
- “It’s—you. The thing inside you.”
- “The thing that thinks and values and makes decisions?”

“Yes! Yes, that’s it. And the thing that feels. You’ve—you’ve given it up. [ . . . ] Dominique. You’re not alive. Where’s your I?”

“Where’s yours, Peter?” she asked quietly.

(*The Fountainhead*, 425)

7. Rearden and his mother:

“Wait! Don’t go! Henry, don’t abandon us! Don’t sentence us to perish! Whatever we are, we’re human! We want to live!”

“Why, no—” he started in quiet astonishment and ended in quiet horror, as the thought struck him fully, “I don’t think you do. If you did, you would have known how to value me.”

(*Atlas Shrugged*, 895)

8. Dagny’s thoughts: But this, . . . this inanimate indifference was the permanent state of the people around her, of men who had no purpose and no passion. *This* was the state of a non-valuing soul; those who chose it—she wondered—did they want to live?

(*Atlas Shrugged* 1109)

9. Galt to Dagny: “I love you more than my life, I who have taught men how life is to be loved. I’ve taught them also never to expect the unpaid for—and what I did tonight, I did it with full knowledge that I would pay for it and that my life might have to be the price.”

(*Atlas Shrugged*, 690)

10. *To Lorne Dieterling* notes (1957): “The issue ‘to think or not to think’ takes actual form, existentially and psychologically, as the issue: ‘To value or to conform.’”

(*Journals of Ayn Rand*, 706)

11. Irina: “There’s something I would like to understand. And I don’t think anyone can explain it. You see, I know it’s the end for me. I know it, but I can’t quite believe it, I can’t feel it. It’s so strange. There’s your life. You begin it, feeling that it’s something so precious and rare, so beautiful that it’s like a sacred treasure. Now it’s over, and it doesn’t make any difference to anyone, and it isn’t that they are indifferent, it’s just that they don’t know, they don’t know what it means, that treasure of mine, and there’s something about it that they should understand. I don’t understand it myself, but there’s something that should be understood by all of us. Only what is it, Kira? What?”

(*We the Living*, 413/324)

12. Introduction to *We The Living* 1959 edition:

At that time, I knew a little more about this question than did Irina, but not much more. I knew that this attitude toward one’s own life should be, but is not, shared by all people—that it is the fundamental characteristics of the best among men—that its absence represents some enormous

evil which had never been identified. I knew that *this is the* issue at the base of all dictatorships, all collectivist theories and all human evils—and that political or economic issues are merely derivatives and consequences of this basic primary. At that time, I looked at any advocates of dictatorship and collectivism with an incredulous contempt: I could not understand how any man could be so brutalized as to claim the right to dispose of the lives of others, nor how any man could be so lacking in self-esteem as to grant to others the right to dispose of his life. Today, the contempt has remained; the incredulity is gone, since I know the answer.

It was not until *Atlas Shrugged* that I reached the full answer to Irina's question. In *Atlas Shrugged* I explain the philosophical, psychological and moral meaning of the men who value their own lives and of the men who don't I show that the first are the Prime Movers of mankind and that the second are metaphysical killers, working for an opportunity to become physical ones. In *Atlas Shrugged*, I show *why* men are motivated either by a life premise or a death premise. In *We the Living*, I show only that they are.

13. Re Ivan Ivanoff: "There was a gay bunch of fellows around the shoemaker's shop. They rose at dawn and they worked hard and their shirts stuck to their backs with sweat, but they had a good time at night. There was a saloon on the corner of the street, and they sang gay songs, their arms about one another's shoulders. There was a house around the corner, where a wizened little man played the piano, and Ivan's favorite was a fat blonde in a pink kimono; she was a foreigner called Gretchen. And those were the nights Citizen Ivan Ivanov remembered."

"He served in the Red Army, and, shells roaring overhead, made bets on lice races with the soldiers in the bottom of the trench. He was wounded and told he would die. He stared dully at the wall, for it did not make any difference.

"He recovered and married a servant girl with round cheeks and round breasts, because he had gotten her in trouble. Their son was blond and husky, and they named him Ivan. They went to church on Sundays, and his wife cooked onions with roasted mutton, when they could get it. She raised her skirt high over her fat legs, and knelt, and scrubbed the white pine floor of their room. And she sent him to a public bath once every month. And Citizen Ivan Ivanov was happy."  
(*We The Living* 547/428)

14. Andrei's speech: "We came as a solemn army and forbade life to the living. We thought everything that breathed [could] <knew how to> live. [Can it?] <Does it?> And aren't those who [can] <know how to> live, aren't they too precious to be sacrificed in the name of any cause? [We've killed thousands. In those thousands—were there three who could have lived? Is there any battle worth the life of one good soldier?] What cause is [worth more] <greater> than those who fight for it? And aren't those who [can] <know how to> fight, aren't they the cause itself and not the means?"  
(*We the Living*, 485/379–80)

15. Andrei's speech: "No one can tell men what they must live for. No one can take that right[. if he doesn't want to face a monster, a horror, which it is not fit for human eyes to bear. Because, you see, [<—because there are things in men, in the best of us, which are above all states, above all collectives[.] things too precious, too sacred, things which no outside hand should dare to touch.]<! Do you ask: what things? Man's mind and his values.> Look into yourself, honestly and fearlessly. Look and don't tell me, don't tell anyone, just tell yourself: what are you living for? Aren't you living for yourself and only for yourself? [For a higher truth which is your own?] Call it your aim, your love, your cause—isn't it still your cause? Give your life, die for your ideal—isn't it still *your* ideal? Every honest man lives for

himself. Every man worth calling a man lives for himself. The one who doesn't—doesn't live at all. You cannot change it. You cannot change it because that's the way man is born, alone, complete, an end in himself. [You cannot change it anymore than you can cause men to be born with one eye instead of two, with three legs or two hearts.] No laws, [no books] <no Party>, no G.P.U. [will ever grow an extra nose on a human face.] <No Party> will ever kill that thing in man which knows how to say 'I.' [But you can try. Oh you can try.] <You cannot enslave man's mind, you can only destroy it.> You have tried. Now look at what you're getting. Look at those whom you allow to triumph. Deny the best in men—and see what will survive. Do we want the crippled, creeping, crawling, broken monstrosities that we're [creating] <producing>? Are we not castrating life in order to perpetuate it?"  
(*We the Living*, 486/380)

16. Roark: "To say 'I love you' one must know first how to say the 'I.'"  
(*The Fountainhead*, 376)
17. Mallory: "I often think that he's the only one of us who's achieved immortality. I don't mean in the sense of fame and I don't mean that he won't die some day. But he's living it. I think he is what the conception really means. You know how people long to be eternal. But they die with every day that passes. When you meet them, they're not what you met last. In any given hour, they kill some part of themselves. They change, they deny, they contradict—and they call it growth. At the end there's nothing left, nothing unreversed or unbetrayed; as if there had never been an entity, only a succession of adjectives fading in and out on an unformed mass. How do they expect a permanence which they have never held for a single moment? But Howard—one can imagine him existing forever."  
(*The Fountainhead*, 452)
18. Roark: "When you suspend your faculty of independent judgment, you suspend consciousness. To stop consciousness is to stop life. . . . That's the emptiness I couldn't understand in people. That's what stopped me whenever I faced a committee. Men without an ego. Opinion without a rational process. Motion without brakes or motor. Power without responsibility. The second-hander acts, but the source of his actions is scattered in every other living person. It's everywhere and nowhere and you can't reason with him. He's not open to reason. You can't speak to him—he can't hear. You're tried by an empty bench. A blind mass running amuck, to crush you without sense or purpose."  
(*The Fountainhead*, 606)
- Roark: "Man cannot survive except through his mind. . . . He must plant his food or hunt it. To plant, he needs a process of thought. To hunt, he needs weapons, and to make weapons—a process of thought. From this simplest necessity to the highest religious abstraction, from the wheel to the skyscraper, everything we are and everything we have comes from a single attribute of man—the function of his reasoning mind."  
(*The Fountainhead*, 679)
19. *First Philosophic Journal*, notes (May 1934):

In regard to *The Revolt of the Masses* [by Jose Ortega y Gasset]: Isn't it a terrible generalization—that can be interpreted in too many different ways—to say that a "noble" man strives to serve and obey, and the 'mass' man to do as he pleases?

If what is meant is the noble man's servitude to his own standards and ideas—is that to be called servitude? If the standards are his, isn't he precisely obeying himself and doing what he pleases?

No truly noble man is going to obey standards set for him by someone else. *That* is the action of the *mass* man. It is the mass man who *cannot* do as he wishes, because he has no wishes; he has to have his standards—or the nearest to that word that he can come—dictated to him. [ . . . ]

This leads to another question—my question of the “supreme egoism.” There exists that body of ideas which represents all the so-called intellectual and spiritual values: ethics, philosophy, etc. (This requires a better definition and analysis—which has to be done later.) My “supreme egoism” consists of the right to apply these values to oneself and to *live them*. For example: if a man is convinced that religion is wrong, he has to *be* and *profess* to be an atheist. The vile, dangerous habit of today is to admit, for instance, that religion is valuable to the majority and, therefore, go to church, profess to be religious, etc., in order to gain something by playing down to the masses. As a consequence, the horrible paradox of our time is that intellectual values are left only to the masses, that they become a special, exclusive privilege of the masses, who not only have no right to them, but lack completely even the elementary *organ* for anything approaching intellectual ideas. It is as if one left sight only as a privilege of the blind. The so-called “selfish” man of today uses “ideas” only as means to attain *his own* end. But what is that end? What is accomplished if the man attains power and prominence at the cost of playing down to the masses? It is not *he* that triumphs, it is not his ideas and standards. It is only his physical frame. Essentially, he is only a slave to those masses. This explains my meaning when I consider the “selfish,” ambitious man of today as essentially *unselfish*, or rather *selfless*. The true selfishness is that which demands the right to its own higher ideas and values. The “supreme egoism” is that which claims things for their *essential*, not their secondary values.

An example from my own experience, which, at the present time, affects me most, is the fact that few men have the ability *or the desire* to judge literary work by its *essential* worth. To most men, that work becomes valuable only after it has been recognized as such by someone else. They themselves do not have any standards of their own (and they do not feel the lack). The same is true of any other field of mental activity: scientific, philosophical, etc. This is the great unselfishness of today. As a matter of fact, unselfishness is merely *selflessness*. The true, highest selfishness, the exalted egoism, is the right to have *one's own* theoretical values and then to apply them to practical reality. Without that *self* there are no values. Here again—*ethics based on self*, not on *society*, the mass, the collective, or any other form of selflessness. (*Journals of Ayn Rand*, 70–71)

20. *The Fountainhead* notes (1935):

- I. The first purpose of the book is *a defense of egoism in its real meaning*, egoism as a new faith. Therefore—a new definition of egoism and its living example. If egoism is the quality which makes one put oneself above all—well, in *what manner*? And—*above what*? If one goes ruthlessly after one's aim—what is the aim? It is not what one does or how one does it, but *why one does it*. It is the ultimate result, the last consequence, the essence and sum of sums which determines the quality of egoism.

One puts oneself above all and crushes everything in one's way to get the best for oneself. Fine! But *what is that best*? Which leads to the question: are morals, or ethics, or all higher values, a thing outside [oneself], i.e., God's law or society's prescription, something related not to a man, but to others around him, an ultimatum forced upon man and essentially selfless and *unselfish*? Or [are these values] a man's very own, his sacred, highest right, his best inspiration, his real life and real self?

And further: what is the *self*? Just the fact that one is born and conscious, just the 'I' devoid of

all definite content? *Or*—the ‘I’ that values, selects and knows precisely the qualities which distinguish it from all other ‘I’s,’ which has reverence for itself for certain definite reasons, not merely because “I-am-what-I-am-and-don’t-know-just-what-I-am.” If one’s physical body is a certain definite body with a certain definite shape and features, not just *a* body—so one’s spirit is a certain definite spirit with definite features and qualities. A spirit without content is an abstraction that does not exist. If one is proud of one’s body for its beauty, created by certain lines and forms, so one is proud of one’s spirit for its beauty, or *that which one considers its beauty*. Without that—there can be no pride of spirit. Nor *any* spirit.

If the higher values of life (such as all ethics, philosophy, esthetics, everything that results from *a sense of valuation* in the mental life of man) come from within, from man’s own spirit, then they are a right, a privilege and a necessity—*not a duty*. They are that which constitutes a man’s life, and if he is an egoist in the best sense of the word he will choose these higher values *for himself* and for himself alone, i.e., for his own sake and satisfaction, not because of a duty to God, fellow-men, the State or any other fool abstraction outside of himself. A man has a code of ethics primarily for his own sake, not for anyone else’s. Consequently, *an ethical man is essentially an egoist. A selfless man cannot be ethical.*

To explain what may sound like a paradox: if by ethics we understand all sets of values, all standards of conduct and thought (without specifying at present just what standards are to be considered ethical; i.e., taking merely the quality of valuing, without defining how one should value), then a man who does not consider his values as *his*, but merely as prescribed to him, or who acts virtuously because he *has* to, not because he *wants* to—that man can hardly be considered virtuous or ethical. The man to whom virtue, or that which he considers virtue, is a necessity, not a painful duty, is the truly ethical man. As example: if a man dies for his cause, because he hates to do it, but feels that some higher power—God or State—compels him to, he is a poor hero; if a man dies because it is *his* cause and he wishes no choice but to defend it at any cost—he *is* a hero.

The question as to what constitutes a standard of values will come later. The primary question is only to establish such a thing as a standard of values and its necessity as part of a man’s own self—without which there is no such thing as *self*.

Now, then, if a man is a ruthless egoist, just what form does his egoism take? Does he fight, struggle and claim for himself those higher values and his right to follow them? *Or*—?—what? The generally accepted example of pure egoism is a ruthless financier who crushes everything in order to obtain money and power—but can he truly be considered an egoist? What does he do with the money? To what purpose does he use the power? Doesn’t he merely—and this is always the case with the conventional type of egoist—give up all standards of value, those prescribed to him as well as his own, in order to get the money? Doesn’t he play down to the mob in every sense and manner, encouraging its vices, sacrificing his own opinions, serving others, *always others*, as a slave—to gain his own ends? Well then—what ends?

*Who is the true egoist:* The man who crushes his own “I” to succeed with others, to fool them, betray them, kill them—but still live as they want him to live and conquer to the extent of a home, a yacht and a full stomach? *Or*—the man who puts his own “I,” his standard of values, above all things, and conquers to live as he pleases, as he chooses and *as he* believes? If a dictator, such as Hitler, for instance, has to play down to the mob in order to hold his influence and rule—*does he rule?* Or does he merely give orders as long as he gives the kind of orders the mob wants to obey? In which case—*who rules whom?* If [William Randolph] Hearst has a great influence because he always sits on the fence and says only that which is “box-office”—where is the influence? When and where can he say what he wants and succeed in getting it? Isn’t he

the greatest of slaves instead of the greatest of powers?

Is power the possibility to force others into doing what you want—or merely in sitting on a high throne, in the full glare of the public light, executing what others want you to do? If a man who is not a Nazi pretends to be one and goes on pretending to the end of his days in order to have a soft job, money and food—is he to be called an egoist? Or isn't the true egoist the one who starves in exile for the right to believe what *he* believes?

A true egoist, therefore, places his ego and the claims of his ego in the realm of higher values. He demands these values because he wants them, and is utterly *selfish* in his demand. If higher values are the meaning of life, if they *are life*—well then, an egoist demands the highest. The man who sacrifices these values for physical comforts does not demand very much. He is not an egoist—*because the ego is absent*.

*An egoist is a man who lives for himself.* In this, I can agree with the worst of Christian moralists. The questions are only: 1) what constitutes living for oneself? and 2) if the first is answered my way, i.e., living for one's highest values, then isn't living for oneself the highest type of living, the only real living and the *only ethical living possible*?

Consequently, my "egoism as a new faith" is a higher meaning and a higher exaltation of the word "I," of that feeling which makes man say and feel "I." Which brings me to the second point of the book.

(*Journals of Ayn Rand*, 77–80)

21. *The Fountainhead* notes (1935; immediately following the preceding):

- II. The thing which is most "wrong with the world" today is its absolute lack of positive values. [ . . . ] of *anything* approaching morals, anything that values, differentiates and says "yes" or "no", a lack of honor, a lack of faith (in a philosophical, not a religious meaning, faith as a set of certain principles, as a goal, aim or inspiration, as a life-system). . . . it is not the absence of a certain type of values that I mean, but the very act and habit of valuing and selecting in one's mental life. Nothing is considered bad and nothing is considered good. There is no enthusiasm for living, since there is no enthusiasm for any part, mode or form of living.

(*Journals of Ayn Rand*, 80)

22. *The Fountainhead* notes (1935; immediately following the preceding):

III. What do I mean by "second-hand lives"?

- 1) All men who have lost the ability to choose, value and pronounce judgment on all questions of spiritual standards. For there is no true judge outside of one's "I." Everything accepted on faith or on someone else's authority is only a warmed-over spiritual hash.
- 2) All men who have reversed the process of "end" and "means" and to whom the means have become the end. For instance, if an egoist struggles for power to achieve his ambitions and ideals—well and good. But if, in the struggle, he sacrifices his ideals merely to achieve the power, he is accepting a second-hand substitute, a thing that has no meaning, that brings him no value whatever, but takes his values away instead.
- 3) All men who, by betraying their egos, actually live for others, not for themselves, live only



through others (this is the main point). For instance: if a man struggles for power and achieves it by accepting and championing the ideology of the masses, he himself knows that *he has no* real power, but he has it only in the eyes of the mob. If a man is a crook and cheats to achieve his ends—he himself knows that *he is* dishonest, but will struggle and scramble to preserve a respectable appearance and reputation in the eyes of others. If a man wants to be a writer and hires a ghost to do his great epic, then bows and happily accepts popular acclaim—he himself knows that he is a nonentity, but rejoices in being a genius in the eyes of others. All deceptions prompted by vanity, all reaping of faked successes, are a second-hand acceptance of something existing only in the minds of our neighbors, not in us, not in our own reality. (Vanity as the most selfless of qualities.) If a man is praised for writing a trashy movie scenario, and glories in the praise, knowing it was trash, he accepts a second-hand achievement in which he himself does not believe. If a man does not create what he likes, but creates that which he *knows* others will admire—it is second-hand creation.

In other words, when a man shifts the center of his life from his own ego to the opinions of others, when those others become the determining factor in all his higher values, when his ideals are one and his actual existence another, when he cheats himself of all reality to create it in others, when higher values become merely a [possession of others to be used] by him for money or physical gain, while he is cheating himself of those higher values and of all life's meaning—he is leading a second-hand life.

Consequently—coming back to where I started—the “great selfishness” of the conventional opportunist is merely an immense betrayal of his self.

(*Journals of Ayn Rand*, 82)

23. *The Fountainhead* notes (1935): A collective valuing would amount to this: one believes what others believe, *because* others believe it. If we have ten people and each one of them chooses to believe only what the nine others believe—just exactly who establishes the belief, and how? . . . There has to be a cause of causes, a determining factor, a basic initiative. If it is not taken by a man—by whom, then, is it taken? If a man is not the one to weigh, value and decide—who decides?  
(*Journals of Ayn Rand*, 86)
24. Roark: “But the best is a matter of standards—and I set my own standards.”  
(*The Fountainhead*, 24)
25. Lansing: “Why are you a good architect? Because you have certain standards of what is good, and they’re your own, and you stand by them. I want a good hotel, and I have certain standards of what is good, and they’re my own, and you’re the one who can give me what I want. And when I fight for you, I’m doing—on my side of it—just what you’re doing when you design a building. Do you think integrity is the monopoly of the artist? And what, incidentally, do you think integrity is? The ability not to pick a watch out of your neighbor’s pocket? No, it’s not as easy as that. If that were all, I’d say ninety-five percent of humanity were honest, upright men. Only, as you can see, they aren’t. Integrity is the ability to stand by an idea. That presupposes the ability to think. Thinking is something one doesn’t borrow or pawn.”  
(*The Fountainhead*, 313)
26. Re Wynand: “The things he collected were chosen by standards of his own. He had famous masterpieces; he had canvases by unknown artists; he rejected the works of immortal names for which

he did not care. The estimates set by collectors and the matter of great signatures were of no concern to him. The art dealers whom he patronized reported that his judgment was that of a master.”  
(*The Fountainhead*, 413)

27. Francisco: “If you want to see an abstract principle, such as moral action, in material form—there it is. Look at it, Mr. Rearden. Every girder of it, every pipe, wire and valve was put there by a choice in answer to the question: right or wrong? You had to choose right and you had to choose the best within your knowledge—the best for your purpose, which was to make steel—and then move on and extend the knowledge, and do better, and still better, with your purpose as your standard of value. You had to act on your own judgment, you had to have the capacity to judge, the courage to stand on the verdict of your mind, and the purest, the most ruthless consecration to the rule of doing right, of doing the best, the utmost best possible to you. Nothing could have made you act against your judgment, and you would have rejected as wrong—as evil—any man who attempted to tell you that the best way to heat a furnace was to fill it with ice. Millions of men, an entire nation, were not able to deter you from producing Rearden Metal—because you had the knowledge of its superlative value and the power which such knowledge gives. But what I wonder about, Mr. Rearden, is why you live by one code of principles when you deal with nature and by another when you deal with men?”  
(*Atlas Shrugged*, 420)
28. Roark: “The famous flutings on the famous columns—what are they there for? To hide the joints in wood—when columns were made of wood, only these aren’t, they’re marble. The triglyphs, what are they? *Wood*. Wooden beams, the way they had to be laid when people began to build wooden shacks. Your Greeks took marble and they made copies of their wooden structures out of it, because others had done it that way. Then your masters of the Renaissance came along and made copies in plaster of copies in marble of copies in wood. Now here we are, making copies in steel and concrete of copies in plaster of copies in marble of copies in wood. Why?”  
(*The Fountainhead*, 23-24)
29. Roark: “No two materials are alike. No two sites on earth are alike. No two buildings have the same purpose. The purpose, the site, the material determine the shape.”  
(*The Fountainhead*, 24)
30. Roark: “. . . the beauty of the human body is that it hasn’t a single muscle which doesn’t serve its purpose; that there’s not a line wasted; that every detail of it fits one idea, the idea of a man and the life of a man. Will you tell me why, when it comes to a building, you don’t want it to look as if it had any sense or purpose. . . . You want it to look like a hybrid beast produced by crossing the bastards of ten different species until you get a creature without guts, without heart or brain, a creature all pelt, tail, claws and feathers? Why? You must tell me, because I’ve never been able to understand it.”  
(*The Fountainhead*, 165)
31. Roark: “Every piece of it is there because the house needs it—and for no other reason. You see it from here as it is inside. The rooms in which you’ll live made the shape. The relation of masses was determined by the distribution of space within. The ornament was determined by the method of construction, an emphasis of the principle that makes it stand. You can see each stress, each support that meets it. Your own eyes go through a structural process when you look at the house, you can follow each step, you see it rise, you know what made it and why it stands.”  
(*The Fountainhead*, 136)

32. Roark: “Do you know what constitutes an integrating principle? A thought. The one thought, the single thought that created the thing and every part of it.”  
(*The Fountainhead*, 579)
33. Roark: “Nothing can be reasonable or beautiful unless it’s made by one central idea, and the idea sets every detail.”  
(*The Fountainhead*, 24)
34. An example of the mind at work in architecture:  
  
Problem: “to design a decent modern unit that could rent for fifteen dollars a month” in Astoria with the materials available in 1937.  
(*The Fountainhead*, 572)  
  
Central idea: “six [concrete] buildings, fifteen stories high, each made in the shape of an irregular star with [triangular] arms [containing modular apartments with prefabricated plastic and light metal components] extending from a central shaft [containing elevators, stairways, and utilities].”  
(*The Fountainhead*, 586)  
  
Details: “The ceilings were pre-cast; the inner walls were of plastic tile that required no painting or plastering; all pipes and wires were laid out in metal ducts at the edge of the floors, to be opened and replaced, when necessary, without costly demolition; the kitchens and bathrooms were prefabricated as complete units; the inner partitions were of light metal that could be folded into the walls to provide one large room or pulled out to divide it . . . ”  
(*The Fountainhead*, 586)
35. Re Keating: When the drawings were ready, he stood looking at them uncertainly. Were he to be told that this was the best or the ugliest house in the world, he would agree with either. He was not sure. He had to be sure.  
(*The Fountainhead*, 72)
36. Re Keating: He felt nothing but immense uncertainty when his sketches were ready and the delicate perspective of a white marble edifice lay, neatly finished, before him. . . . It looked good . . . it might be good . . . he was not sure.  
(*The Fountainhead*, 173)
37. Keating: “But you see; I’m not sure, Howard. I’m never sure of myself. I don’t know whether I’m as good as they all tell me I am.”  
(*The Fountainhead*, 33)
38. He could not say that he liked to paint. It was neither pleasure nor relief, it was self-torture, but somehow, that didn’t matter. He sat on a canvas stool before a small easel and he looked at an empty sweep of hills, at the woods and the sky. He had a quiet pain as sole conception of what he wanted to express, a humble, unbearable tenderness for the sight of the earth around him—and something tight, paralyzed, as sole means to express it. He went on. He tried. He looked at his canvases and knew that nothing was captured in their childish crudeness. It did not matter. No one was to see them. He stacked

them carefully in a corner of the shack, and he locked the door before he returned to town. There was no pleasure in it, no pride, no solution; only—while he sat alone before the easel—a sense of peace.  
(*The Fountainhead*, 564)

39. Cameron: “What in Christ’s name was your idea? What possessed you to indent that plan here? Did you just want to make it pretty, because you had to patch something together? Who do you think you are? Guy Francon, God help you? . . . Look at this building, you fool! You get an idea like this and you don’t know what to do with it! You stumble on a magnificent thing and you have to ruin it!”  
(*The Fountainhead*, 49)
40. Roark got up, reached out, tore a thick branch off a tree, held it in both hands, one fist closed at each end; then, his wrists and knuckles tensed against the resistance, he bent the branch slowly into an arc. “Now I can make what I want of it: a bow, a spear, a cane, a railing. That’s the meaning of life. [ . . . ] Your work.” He tossed the branch aside. “The material the earth offers you and what you make of it. . . .”  
(*The Fountainhead*, 551)
41. “Productive work” does not mean the blind performance of the motions of some job. It means the conscious, rational pursuit of a *productive career*. In popular usage, the term “career” is applied only to the more ambitious types of work; but, in fact, it applies to *all* work: it denotes a man’s attitude toward his work.  
(*The Ayn Rand Letter*, vol. III, no. 26, 373)
42. The difference between a career-man and a job-holder is as follows: a career-man regards his work as constant progress, as a constant upward motion from one achievement to another, higher one, driven by the constant expansion of his mind, his knowledge, his ability, his creative ingenuity, never stopping to stagnate on any level. A job-holder regards his work as a punishment imposed on him by the incomprehensible malevolence of reality or of society, which, somehow, does not let him exist without effort; so his policy is to go through the least amount of motions demanded of him by somebody and to stay put in any job or drift off to another, wherever chance, circumstances or relatives might happen to push him.  
(*The Ayn Rand Letter*, vol. III, no. 26, 373)
43. An open car drove by, fleeing into the country. The car was overfilled with people bound for a picnic. There was a jumble of bright sweaters, and scarfs fluttering in the wind; a jumble of voices shrieking without purpose over the roar of the motor, and overstressed hiccoughs of laughter; a girl sat sidewise, her legs flung over the side of the car; she wore a man’s straw hat slipping down to her nose and she yanked savagely at the strings of a ukulele, ejecting raucous sounds, yelling “Hey!” These people were enjoying a day of their existence; they were shrieking to the sky their release from the work and the burdens of the days behind them; they had worked and carried the burdens in order to reach a goal—and this was the goal.  
(*The Fountainhead*, 135)
44. “The Objectivist Ethics”: Let me stress this. The first question is not: What particular code of values should man accept? The first question is: Does man need values at all—and why?  
(*The Virtue of Selfishness*, 14)

## 45. "The Objectivist Ethics":

An *ultimate* value is that final goal or end to which all lesser goals are the means—and it sets the standard by which all lesser goals are *evaluated*. An organism's life is its *standard of value*: that which furthers its life is the *good*, that which threatens it is the *evil*.

Without an ultimate goal or end, there can be no lesser goals or means: a series of means going off into an infinite progression toward a nonexistent end is a metaphysical and epistemological impossibility. It is only an ultimate goal, an *end in itself*, that makes the existence of values possible. Metaphysically, *life* is the only phenomenon that is an end in itself: a value gained and kept by a constant process of action. Epistemologically, the concept of "value" is genetically dependent upon and derived from the antecedent concept of "life." To speak of "value" as apart from "life" is worse than a contradiction in terms. "It is only the concept of 'Life' that makes the concept of 'Value' possible."  
(*The Virtue of Selfishness*, 17–18)

## 46. Galt:

"The key to what you so recklessly call 'human nature' . . . is the fact that *man is a being of volitional consciousness*. Reason does not work automatically; thinking is not a mechanical process; . . . In any hour and issue of your life, you are free to think or to evade that effort. But you are not free to escape from your nature, from the fact that *reason* is your means of survival—so that for you, who are a human being, the question 'to be or not to be' is the question 'to think or not to think.' [ . . . ]

"Man has been called a rational being, but rationality is a matter of choice—and the alternative his nature offers him is: rational being or suicidal animal. Man has to be man—by choice; he has to hold his life as a value—by choice; . . .

"No, you do not have to live as a man; it is an act of moral choice. But you cannot live as anything else—and the alternative is that state of living death which you now see within you and around you, the state of a thing unfit for existence, no longer human and less than animal, a thing that knows nothing but pain and drags itself through its span of years in the agony of unthinking self-destruction.

No, you do not have to think; it is an act of moral choice. But someone had to think to keep you alive; if you choose to default, you default on existence and you pass the deficit to some moral man, expecting him to sacrifice his good for the sake of letting you survive by your evil.  
(*Atlas Shrugged* 930–933, cf. "The Objectivist Ethics," *The Virtue of Selfishness* 22–23)

47. *Moral Basis of Individualism*, notes (July 1945):

Every living thing exercises a form of choice—to the extent of assimilating only those elements which are necessary to its survival, not any and all elements indiscriminately. A plant absorbs particular chemicals out of the soil. An animal hunts particular foods. To live, a living thing must have a code of values: that which is good for it and that which is not. Its survival is the standard, the measure of value. But for a plant or an animal, the standard, the values, the method of survival and the exercise of that method are automatic; no other choice is possible; no conscious choice is necessary.

Man's method of survival is not automatic. He must establish it by conscious choice based on a rational observation of nature and of himself; he must discover what he is, what he needs, how he must act in order to exist. He must establish his own code of values. Its standard must still be the same: survival. But the values he establishes must be the ones needed by and appropriate to his one

and only means of survival—the human means—the rational faculty.

A moral code is man's statement of the principles that permit him to function as man. It is his protection against becoming his own destroyer. It is a set of values upon which he bases his rules of conduct, the rules of what is right or wrong for him as a rational being. The moral faculty is a part and a necessity of the rational faculty.

The establishment of values requires a standard. The concept of "value" presupposes an entity to whom an object or action is valuable. Moral values constitute a code of good and evil. By what standard are they to be set? Good—for whom? Good—for what?

Man's nature sets the standard of his moral code. Man's survival sets the purpose. His proper morality is based on a single axiom:

*Man exists and must survive as man. [ . . . ]*

Before we proceed to analyze in detail the implications contained in the above axiom and the specific code of behavior it demands, we must stop to examine and fully understand the nature of the axiom itself. It consists of three facts which must be accepted as self-evident: 1) that man exists, 2) that man is a rational being, 3) that man's survival is desirable. [ . . . ]

- 3) Every living thing is motivated by the instinct of self-preservation. This is implicit in the mere fact of life. Life is a matter of motion and activity; a living thing not motivated by self-preservation would not and could not preserve itself. But a plant's or an animal's method of survival is automatic, i.e., instinctive; therefore its motive is an instinct. Man's survival is not achieved instinctively; therefore an instinct is inadequate to motivate it. His motive must be conscious.

(*[Note added later:]* Most men actually have no desire to survive—in fact, they act as if they had accepted the opposite premise; their actions are consistent with a hatred of life.)

Man needs a rational decision, an axiom understood and consciously accepted: I wish to survive—my survival is desirable. In accepting this, he has accepted the standard and the first axiom of morality.

In morality man's life is taken as the supreme value. It is the gauge by which the value of every part, aspect and action of his existence is to be measured.

If anyone now asks: But why do I have to hold my survival as desirable?—The answer is: You don't have to. It is an axiom, to be accepted as self-evident. If it is not self-evident to you, you have an alternative: admit that your survival is not desirable and get out of the way. There is no middle-ground and no middle choice. The act of evading this issue, making no decision, closing your mind and just floating along, is precisely the act of suspending your rational faculty—of refusing to observe a fact, to identify it and to understand it. It is the primary act of your self-destruction. With that as your first premise, you will not survive—and the span of life you have at your disposal will be a succession of acts leading to your self-annihilation, as the history of mankind and of most private lives has amply demonstrated. You have many choices open to you, but the choice is saying: "I don't have to decide whether life is desirable, I'll just live" is not one of them. That choice is not given to you because the life you refer to is a human life, and a human life is not preserved automatically.

(*Journals of Ayn Rand*, 298)

## 48. Notes While Writing (March 8, 1947):

*The progression of a man's mental (and psychological) development.* (The progression of a man's consciousness.)

1. He acquires factual knowledge of objects around him, of events, and therefore concludes that a universe exists and that he exists (through the evidence given to him by his senses, grasped and put in order by his reasoning mind). Here he gets the materials to grasp two things: objective reality and himself, consciousness and self-consciousness.
2. He discovers that he has the capacity of choice. First, he grasps objects, entities—then that these entities *act*, i.e., move or change. (It may seem to be almost simultaneous, but actually he must grasp “entity” before he can grasp “acting entity.”) The same [applies to] himself: first he gains self-consciousness, then he learns that this self can act (*or must act*) and that he must do it through choice. (Such as: if he is hungry, he must ask for food, or cry for it, or go and get it, but he must *do* something, choose what to do, and choose to do it.) Why does he get the conception of the necessity to act? *That* is his nature as man—he must preserve his life through his own action and that action is not automatic; he must preserve his life through *conscious choice*.

The basis of his choice will be self-preservation; this will form his first standard of values, and give him his first conception of such things as “value” and “a *standard* of value.” This is his first conception of “good” and “evil.” His physical entity will give him the first evidence and the start toward it—through physical pain and pleasure. He feels pain when he is hungry; he has no choice about this; but he discovers that he must exercise choice if he wants the pain to stop—he must get food; the food isn't given to him automatically. If he finds pleasure in eating, he learns that he must choose to act in order to get that pleasure, and choose right.

This is the basic pattern, and as he grows and discovers other fields of activity, the same holds true: he learns that he must choose and act on his choice; he forms desires according to the standards of value he has established (his own pleasure, satisfaction or happiness—this grows in complexity as his mind, experience, and knowledge grow) and he acts to [satisfy] these desires according to these values.

His first desires are given to him by nature; they are the ones that he needs directly for his body, such as food, warmth, etc. Only these desires are provided by nature and they teach him the concept of desire. Everything else from then on proceeds from his mind, from the standards and conclusions accepted by his mind and it goes to satisfy his *mind*—for example, his first toys. (Perhaps sex is the one field that unites the needs of mind and body, with the mind determining the desire and the body providing the means of expressing it. But the sex act itself is only that—an *expression*. The essence is mental, or spiritual.)

Essentially, and most basically, his standard of value will always be *pleasure* or *pain*, i.e., *happiness* or suffering, and these, essentially, are: that which contributes to *the preservation* or *the destruction* of his life. (This applies to his most complex, abstract desires later on.)

(Note: “life” and “self-preservation” are actually synonyms, in the sense that the last is implied in the first. Life is a process, an activity, which the living thing must perform—that is what makes it a living thing. Man must do it consciously—the essence and tool of his life is his mind.)

This stage, then, is the discovery of *choice and values*, i.e., of *free will* and *morality*.

3. Now that he knows that he can choose (and must choose), can have desires and can achieve them—he is ready to start forming his conscious convictions about the universe, about himself and about what he intends to do. (These convictions, or basic principles, are already implied in the above process. But now he must state them.)

These three steps are the essence of the process. But now man must remain convinced consciously of the validity of what he's learned in that process. It implies: *free will*, *self-confidence* (confidence in one's own judgment), *self-respect* (the conviction that the preservation of his life and the achievement of his happiness are values, are *good*), and a *benevolent universe* in which he can achieve happiness (if he remains realistic, that is, true to reality observed by his *reason*). If his desires are derived from and based on reality correctly observed—they *will be achievable* in this universe. All his desires come from reality, but the wrong ones are due to his mistakes in judgment; if he realizes the mistake, a contradiction or an inherent impossibility, he will not continue to desire these objects; he won't damn the universe for not giving him the irrational or impossible.

(*Journals of Ayn Rand*, 554)

49. Rearden's motivational crisis:

What was the use? Why had he done it? Why should he ever want to do anything again? . . .

His first day on the ledges of the ore mines . . . The day when he stood in the wind, looking down at the ruins of a steel plant . . . The day when he stood here, in this office, at this window, and thought that a bridge could be made to carry incredible loads on just a few bars of metal, if one combined a truss with an arch, if one built diagonal bracing with the top members curved to—

He stopped and stood still. He *had not* thought of combining a truss with an arch, that day.

In the next moment, he was at his desk, bending over it, with one knee on the seat of the chair, with no time to think of sitting down, he was drawing lines, curves, triangles, columns of calculations, indiscriminately on the blueprints, on the desk blotter, on somebody's letters.

(*Atlas Shrugged*, 203)