

# Is Virtue Only a Means to Happiness? An Analysis of Virtue and Happiness in Ayn Rand's Writings<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

"Virtue is not an end in itself. Virtue is not its own reward . . . .  
*Life* is the reward of virtue—and happiness is the goal and  
reward of life."<sup>2</sup>

This formulation suggests that happiness is something entirely external to virtue, a further consequence of acting virtuously. Virtue, on this view, is only an instrumental means to the agent's happiness. As Leonard Peikoff states in his book on Objectivism, "[i]n the Objectivist approach, virtue is (by definition) the means to value," including the supreme value, happiness. Virtue is practical, he explains, in the sense that it "minimizes the risks inherent in life and maximizes the chance of success" or happiness (328).

However, although this is Ayn Rand's official view, she does not always treat virtue as purely instrumental to happiness. As I will show, her novels and some of her theoretical statements present a different view, a view that, I believe, is far closer to the truth. Unfortunately, the purely instrumental analysis of virtue has become standard in current interpretations of Objectivist ethics, thanks to the persistence of two false assumptions. One assumption is that the sole alternative to regarding virtue as merely instrumental to happiness is to regard it as wholly an end in itself, i.e., as Rand puts it, as "its own reward". Another is that to regard virtue as an end in itself is to regard it as quite unconnected to happiness. And this is to open the flood-gates to the irrationalism of intrinsicism or supernaturalism. Hence, the consequence of rejecting virtue as merely instrumental to happiness is to be unable to justify virtue in rational terms.

However, both assumptions are false. First, the alternative to regarding virtue as merely instrumental to a further end is not necessarily to regard it as wholly an end in itself. There is a third logical possibility, namely, to regard virtue as partly a means to happiness and partly an end in itself. Further, to regard virtue as an end in itself is not necessarily to regard it as unconnected to happiness. This is, indeed, how Kant regarded it, but not, for example, Socrates or the Stoics. It can be an end in itself in the sense that it is (wholly or partly) *constitutive* of the supreme end, happiness. I believe that conceiving of virtue as purely instrumental to happiness shows a misunderstanding not only of the nature of virtue, but also of the nature of happiness. An adequate analysis of the virtues requires that we recognize virtuous activity as an ineliminable

constituent of happiness, and an adequate analysis of happiness requires that we recognize it as partly constituted by virtuous activity. This conception of the relationship between virtue and happiness allows happiness to remain the *summum bonum*, while leaving room for justifying virtue in terms of its role in happiness. This conception of virtue and happiness is also the one that best captures the vision of the ideal individual—the individual of virtue—and of the ideal life—the life of happiness<sup>4</sup>—in Rand’s novels. And it is implied by at least some of her explicit statements about the relationship between virtue and happiness. In this paper I will give an analysis of virtue, of happiness, and of their relationship that is both philosophically defensible, and adequate to Rand’s vision of the ideal individual and the ideal life.

## THE NATURE OF VIRTUE

### Rand’s Conception of Virtue

Rand defines virtue as the act by which we gain/and or keep value.<sup>5</sup> But she also defines particular virtues, such as justice, pride, integrity, honesty, et al, more fully in terms of the recognition of certain facts and of actions that accord with such recognition. Thus, justice “is the recognition of the fact that you cannot fake the character of men as you cannot fake the character of nature, that you must judge all men as conscientiously as you judge inanimate objects, with the same respect for truth, with the same incorruptible vision, by as pure and as *rational* a process of identification—that every man must be judged for what he is and treated accordingly . . .” (AS, 937, FNI, 129). Similarly, integrity “is the recognition of the fact that you cannot fake your consciousness” (AS, 936, FNI, 129), a recognition that is expressed in loyalty to one’s rational values and convictions in the face of the contrary opinions of others (VOS, 28, 52, 80). And honesty “is recognition of the fact that you cannot fake existence,” a recognition that is expressed in truthfulness in thought and speech (AS, 936-37, FNI, 129).

When Rand says, “you cannot fake the character of men”—or your consciousness or existence—she obviously does not mean that it is impossible to do so, since this would imply that injustice or lack of integrity or honesty are impossible. She means that you cannot do so in the long run without detriment to yourself, that to do so is disvaluable. Thus, recognition of the value of not faking various aspects of reality in thought and deed—or, in positive terms, of facing reality—is implicit in virtuous action. When we act virtuously, whatever other values we might aim to bring about, we give expression to—and, thereby, maintain—the value we place on facing reality. In this sense, every virtuous action both maintains a value, and is a means to some value. This is in keeping with Rand’s general definition of virtue as the act by which we gain or keep value.<sup>6</sup>

The value of justice, integrity, and honesty, as of the “higher-order” virtues of rationality, productiveness, and pride, is connected to what Rand regards as the three cardinal values: reason, purpose, and self-esteem. These values, says Rand, are “the means to and the realization of one’s ultimate value, one’s own life” (VOS, 27) as a rational being, and, therefore, one’s own happiness, conceived of as a “successful state of life” and its emotional concomitant (AS, 932; FNI, 123; VOS, 27-29).<sup>7</sup>

There is, thus, a hierarchy of values, as there is a hierarchy of virtues. There are the specific values connected to the different virtues, the three cardinal values, and the ultimate value, happiness. The particular values have a necessary connection to the three cardinal values, and these to happiness. As Rand says, the cardinal values are both the means to, and the realization of, one's ultimate value, happiness. As far as I know, Rand does not explain what it means for these values to "realize" happiness, or how they do so. But when we talk of an action or state of affairs realizing something, we mean that it gives expression to, or embodies, that thing. Thus, a process of self-realization is a process of giving expression to the self, of "bringing forth" the deepest aspects of one's self. Again, a career that realizes one's aspirations is a career in which one can give expression to one's aspirations, embody them in one's work. Applying this to the cardinal values, then, we can say that reason, purpose, and self-esteem realize an aspect of happiness because they express or embody an aspect of happiness. Thus, self-esteem is a sense of self-worth, one's worth as a person, and the state of having self-esteem is inherently—by its very nature—a state of deep, enduring satisfaction. But this is exactly the sort of state we think a happy life must include. It follows, then, that self-esteem is itself partly constitutive of happiness. It is also a means to happiness because the sense of one's worth as a person serves as an important motivating factor in acting to achieve happiness.

Putting Rand's definitions of virtue together, we can say that, according to Rand, virtue consists of recognizing various values as both means to, and part of, happiness, and acting to gain and/or keep them.

Even this fuller definition, however, will not quite do. What is missing is the idea that a virtue is a character trait, an enduring disposition or orientation that is expressed in virtuous acts. As Rand's novels amply illustrate, our moral responses reveal our characters—our selves, our souls. And our characters consist not only of particular cognitions of value and actions motivated by such cognition, but also of general dispositions or tendencies to so cognize and act.

But even this is not enough. Rand's language often suggests that the recognition of values that is part and parcel of virtue is entirely intellectual in nature. But virtuous character traits are not only intellectual dispositions to apprehend and achieve value, they are also emotional dispositions. The rationality of virtuous dispositions and actions, I will argue, is a function of the intellect as well as of the emotions. Hence, when I refer to a virtuous disposition as a rational disposition, I will have in mind an integrated intellectual and emotional disposition. It is this sort of disposition that is possessed by Rand's protagonists, whom she sees as exemplars of virtue, of moral excellence. In the next section, I will outline a conception of virtue that captures the character of Rand's protagonists better than her own explicit statements about virtue, and that is more adequate to our everyday and scientific knowledge of human psychology.

### **A More Adequate Conception of Virtue**

What must be true of virtuous traits and actions if they are to count as morally excellent, the pinnacle of moral achievement?

(i) First, to count as excellent, a virtuous act must not only be motivated by a

particular cognition and choice of the truly valuable, it must also express a standing disposition or habitual tendency to cognize and choose what is truly valuable. For an act that expresses a standing disposition is more deeply rooted—and, thereby, better—than an act that is merely motivated by a particular cognition.

(ii) Secondly, to count as excellent, virtuous traits must make us responsive to the morally relevant features of the situations we face. But someone whose emotional *dispositions* are at variance with her intellectual dispositions will often fail to notice the morally relevant or important features of a situation. And so she will be a less reliable moral agent than someone whose emotions are integrated with her intellectual convictions.

The idea that (irrational) emotions can disrupt rational thought and action is a commonplace. But the idea that (rational) emotions are required for rational thought and action is simply the other side of the same coin. Depending on whether one's emotions are rational or irrational, they will direct one's attention towards or away from what is truly important and, thereby, affect the accuracy of one's total picture of things. Hence, someone who is committed to doing the right thing and has the right principles, but whose emotions are at variance with her intellectual commitments, will often fail to notice exactly what sort of response justice or courage or kindness requires in a particular instance. For intellectual principles alone cannot tell us what is relevant or important to one's choice of action in every particular situation of a certain kind, any more than medical principles can tell us which symptoms are relevant or important to the right diagnosis in every instance of a certain disease. The morally important features of a situation depend on the current and past context, and contexts vary indefinitely. For example, a principle, or set of principles, can tell us that when someone has suffered a loss through his own carelessness, sometimes the important or relevant feature of the situation is the loss (and the right response sympathy), at other times, the carelessness (and the right response probably something other than sympathy). But principles can provide only this sort of general guidance; they cannot tell us which feature is relevant or important when.<sup>10</sup> The ability to discern what is relevant or important in a given situation depends, in part, on experience and the stock of value-judgments that are embodied in our (rational) emotions.

A vast amount of both everyday and scientific evidence supports this point. It also supports the more general and basic point that it is emotions that make us aware of the value-dimension of most things in the first place and, indeed, partly constitute many of our values. If human beings lost their emotional faculties and became beings of pure intellect, they would also lose most of their values or their ability to apprehend values. Thus, because he is largely intellect, Star Trek's Spock can neither see the importance of certain things in human life, nor have many of the same values. To paraphrase Daniel Goleman, without emotions the intellect is blind (*ibid*, 53). Likewise, people with an impaired emotional faculty, such as psychopaths, or people who have suffered certain sorts of brain injuries, are unable to grasp what matters in human affairs. They are rational in a purely abstract sense: they can perform complex calculations and deductions, and can even follow arguments for doing or not

doing certain things. But they simply cannot be motivated by their abstract intellectual understanding of what must be done to attain certain ends, because these ends mean nothing to them, have no *importance* to them. In standard philosophical terminology, they have *theoretical* rationality, but no *practical* rationality, neither in connection with their own welfare, nor in connection with others' welfare. In the case of psychopaths, at least, this inability to have a sense of the importance of things leads to a profound amorality.

The idea that a virtuous disposition must include not only an intellectual commitment to objective values, but also an emotional orientation towards such values, is well illustrated in Rand's depiction of her characters. The following passage from *Atlas Shrugged* shows how the emotions of someone who possesses the virtues enhance her awareness and guide her responses.

Dagny, the heroine of the novel, has been looking for a scientist who can understand the design and structure of the motor she has discovered in a scrap pile, the motor she later learns was invented by Galt. On failing to find anyone intelligent enough or interested enough in her discovery, she reluctantly calls upon the brilliant Dr. Stadler. Reluctantly, because, despite his dedication to principles of rationality and truth in science, he fails to apply them to human affairs. As he has told Dagny on an earlier occasion, "[m]en are not open to truth or reason," and must be deceived or forced if the men of intellect are to accomplish anything (180). And so he endorses the establishment of a state-funded Institute of Science, and allows himself to become a lackey of politicians in the name of saving science. When Hank Rearden's metal is unjustly attacked in his name, he refuses to dissociate himself from the attack. This is the background of Dagny's decision to meet with Dr. Stadler in the hope of uncovering the secret of the motor—and its inventor.

When Stadler reads about the motor in the materials that Dagny presents to him, he openly expresses his astonishment and delight at the extraordinary achievement. Dagny wishes that "she could smile in answer and grant him the comradeship of a joy celebrated together," but finds herself unable to do any more than nod and say a cold "Yes" (332). Her response here is true to the full context of her knowledge of Stadler, a context made immediately available to her only with the help of her emotions. Throughout the discussion her responses are guided by her knowledge of Stadler's past, even as they are finely calibrated to variations in Stadler's present behavior. Thus, when he exclaims, "It's so wonderful to see a great, new, crucial idea which is not mine," and asks her if she has ever felt a "longing" for someone she "could admire," she softens and tells him that she's felt it all her life (335).

Not only do the emotions of someone who possesses the virtues guide moral perception and response, they even sometimes correct our intellectual judgments. Thus, when Dagny is on her way to confront Francisco who, apparently, has turned into a playboy, destroying people and fortunes, she is determined to grant him no personal response, for she is certain that he deserves none. Yet when he smiles at her, "the unchanged, insolent, brilliant smile of his childhood," and greets her with their childhood greeting, she finds herself greeting him likewise, "irresistibly, helplessly, happily" (114). Her emotions pick up something that her intellect alone could not, and lead her to respond appropriately to the facts, though contrary to her intentions.

These and similar passages illustrate some of the ways in which Rand's portrayal of virtue in her novels goes beyond her theoretical statements about virtue.

To summarize the discussion thus far: to count as a moral excellence, a fully virtuous act must be deeply rooted in us, i.e., in a virtuous character trait, and such a trait must be an integrated intellectual-emotional disposition that enables us to recognize, and respond appropriately to, the relevant features of a particular situation. What else must be the case for virtuous acts and traits to count as virtuous—as the pinnacle of moral achievement?

(iii) Thirdly, a virtuous act is an act that is done not only for the right reasons—i.e., for the sake of the good, the valuable—but also in the right manner. This, too, implies that a virtue is an integrated intellectual-emotional disposition. For if our emotions are at variance with our intellectual dispositions and judgments, then, even if we recognize that a certain sort of act is called for, and why, we may fail to do it in the right manner.

For example, conceding a point in an argument when we recognize that it is only fair to do so does not count for much if we concede it in a resentful manner, and is not necessarily better than not conceding it at all (“O.k., o.k., you win!”). Again, helping someone in need when we judge that we should is not an act of kindness if we do it with an air of performing a painful duty. Nor is it necessarily better than not helping at all. Thus, the wrong manner can undermine the very rightness of an act done for the right reasons, and the manner can be wrong *even when the agent recognizes the importance of acting in the right manner*. For wayward emotional dispositions, emotional dispositions that are contrary to one's rational intellectual beliefs and commitments, can subvert one's intended responses. But even if someone with such dispositions always manages to act in the right manner through sheer strength of will when she can see what the right manner requires, she will sometimes be unable to see what it requires. And so, even though admirably strong, she will remain a less reliable—and so less good—agent than a virtuous person.

In short, fully virtuous acts express deep-seated dispositions to think, feel, desire, and respond fittingly, with fine discrimination, in a variety of situations. Since these dispositions involve the agent's emotions as well as intellect, virtuous acts express not only the agent's *commitment* to the right, but her wholehearted *love* of the right. This wholeheartedness is exemplified in Dagny's character, whose “love of rectitude,” we are told, was “the only love to which all the years of her life had been given” (AS, 512). When the “moratorium on brains” is announced, this love expresses itself in a total, cold anger—and a calm, full, intellectual certainty in the decision that she must immediately resign from the Vice-Presidency of Taggart Transcontinental (*ibid*). Only a wholehearted love of the good—a love in which all of the agent's self is involved, rather than only her intellectual self—can express virtue, because a wholehearted love of the good is better than a half-hearted or divided love. And this not only because it is more reliable, but also because it is more expressive of the worth of its object.

(iv) Lastly, as a moral excellence, a virtuous character must put us in the best state for achieving the supreme value, happiness, conceived of as a “successful state of life” and its emotional concomitant. To do this it must (a) enable us

to stay in touch with reality, and (b) integrate and harmonize our inner life. The more “gappy” our grasp of reality, the more precarious our happiness, and inner conflict is both inherently unpleasant and an obstacle to this grasp. The connection of virtue with happiness is one more reason why virtue must be seen as an integrated intellectual-emotional disposition. For, as we have already seen, inner harmony and a solid connection with reality both require an integration of our emotions with our reason.

In short, if moral virtue is excellence of character, then a virtuous disposition must be one that incorporates both our intellectual and our emotional attitudes. This is explicitly recognized by Aristotle in his definition of virtue, a definition that captures what Rand depicts in her fiction far better than her own definition.

### **Aristotle’s Conception of Virtue and Rand’s Virtuous Individuals**

Aristotle defines virtue as “a state [of character] concerned with choice, lying in a mean relative to us, this being determined by reason and in the way in which the man of practical wisdom would determine it.”

Virtue is a disposition to choose the “mean” in the sense that it is a disposition to choose the “intermediate” or appropriate response, and to do so in a wide variety of situations. By contrast, vice is a disposition to choose the “extreme” or inappropriate response. For example, the virtue of generosity is the mean opposed to the vices of prodigality and stinginess. Likewise, courage is the mean opposed to the vices of recklessness and cowardice. Someone who has the virtues has the ready ability to “hit the nail on the head”—to respond exactly appropriately—in a wide variety of difficult situations. And the disposition to respond appropriately is the disposition to feel, deliberate, choose, and act “at the right [appropriate] times, about the right things, towards the right people, for the right end, and in the right way” (NE, 1106b21-23).

Further, the mean is “relative to us” in the sense that the right or appropriate action depends on both the external circumstances of action and on certain features of the agent. Thus, what counts as generosity for a graduate student might be stinginess for a millionaire and prodigality for an undergraduate student. For example: a \$50 contribution to an organization that promotes the cause of freedom might be generous for a graduate student, prodigal for an undergraduate student, and downright stingy for a millionaire who professes dedication to the cause of freedom above all other causes. The mean or virtuous act in a given situation is “determined by reason” in the sense that practical reason—reason as applied to the question of how to act or, more generally, how to live—takes all the relevant facts into consideration.

The man of practical wisdom exemplifies practical reason at its best. For practical wisdom—the virtue of practical reason—just is excellence in practical reasoning. But practical reason both shapes, and is shaped by, emotion. Hence, practical wisdom is possible only with the proper emotional dispositions that are part and parcel of virtue. A wise and virtuous choice, Aristotle remarks, expresses “truth agreeing with correct desire” (NE 1139a30) or correct desire combined with correct thought (NE 1139b5). Thus, practical wisdom and virtue imply each other. The inner states and actions of the virtuous or wise man display not merely an intellectual commitment to principle, but an

intellectual and emotional disposition that informs his characteristic ways of deliberating, perceiving, feeling, desiring, and acting. Moreover, since we all get pleasure from doing what we love—the philosopher from philosophizing, the painter from painting, the runner from running—the person who loves virtue gets pleasure from acting virtuously. This sort of pleasure is inherent in virtuous activity, and inseparable from it. Hence, the pleasure of virtuous activity qua virtuous, including the pleasurable awareness of oneself in such activity, is not interchangeable with other sorts of pleasure, such as the pleasure inherent in running qua running, or solving a puzzle, or consuming fine truffles. These pleasures are independent of whether or not the activities in which they inhere are compatible with one's overall happiness. The pleasure of virtuous activity, by contrast, is the distinctive pleasure of tracking and expressing particular values in an awareness of their relationship to the supreme value, one's own happiness.

This does not mean that there can be no pain attendant on virtuous action. When a serious loss of, or serious damage to, other goods is involved, Aristotle recognizes that the right action will involve pain. But the pain will be due to the loss of real, important goods, not to the loss of trifles, or of things that should never have been valued in the first place. Nor, of course, will the pain come from the knowledge that one is doing the right thing—only the very vicious would find *this* painful.

Aristotle distinguishes between the virtuous man and the strong-willed or continent (*enocratic*) man. Both have the right principles and commitments, and dispositionally act in accordance with their intellectual judgment. Nevertheless, the strong-willed man falls short of practical wisdom and virtue because his emotions conflict with his intellectual judgment. He is rational without possessing that excellence of practical reason which is practical wisdom, and he is rightly motivated without possessing that excellence of desire and feeling which is virtue of character. Hence, he also lacks the fine-tuned perceptiveness and responsiveness that is characteristic of the virtuous. And he is robbed of the pleasure that the man of virtue gets from acting virtuously. He would be a better, as well as a happier, man if he were virtuous rather than merely strong-willed.

Rand does not make the Aristotelian distinction between a virtuous and a merely *enocratic* character in her ethical theory, nor are there any *enocratic* characters in her novels. But her portrayals of her ideal characters illustrate the Aristotelian conception of a virtuous character. When her heroes and heroines act honestly or fairly or kindly, they do so wholeheartedly, i.e., without inner conflict over whether to do the right thing or take the easy way out. Their choices and actions express their intellectual as well as emotional states. They *desire* to do what they correctly *perceive* as good and *intellectually believe* they ought to do. And so their responses “hit the mean” in a wide variety of situations.

A good example of this occurs in a scene in *The Fountainhead*, where Peter Keating goes to see Howard Roark to bribe him for remaining silent about his contribution to the Cosmo-Slotnick building, the building for which Keating has won an award. In the conversation that precedes the actual offering of the bribe, Keating tries to persuade Roark to compromise his principles and aim for success. “Just drop that fool delusion that you're better than everybody else—and go to work . . . Just think, Howard, think of it! You'll be rich, you'll

be famous, you'll be respected, you'll be praised, you'll be admired—you'll be one of us!"<sup>13</sup> Roark looks at him, with eyes that are "attentive and wondering," knowing that Peter is sincere, but also that he is disturbed by something in him, Roark, and asks, "Peter, what is it that disturbs you about me as I am?" (192). Keating responds honestly, acknowledging that he is disturbed by something in Roark, although he doesn't know what. In the face of this confession, Roark's response "hits the mean" by being exactly appropriate to the situation. "Pull yourself together, Peter," said Roark gently, as to a comrade. "We'll never speak of that again." To the extent that Keating is honest, he is Roark's equal, to be treated with respect, not scorn. And because he is honest and willing to show that he is ashamed of himself, he deserves the kindness of being given the chance to "pull himself together," to recover his dignity. In the next moment, however, Keating's attitude changes. He pretends that he was "only talking good plain horse sense," thereby implicitly denying his fear of Roark. Roark's attitude changes immediately: he responds to this dishonesty harshly, telling Peter to shut up. Once again, Roark's response "hits the mean," giving Peter exactly the treatment he deserves.

In this scene, as in many others, we see an individual whose responses are appropriate to the situation in all the ways delineated by Aristotle: in aim, in timing, in the emotions felt, and in manner. Such "fine-tuning" of his responses is possible only because they are informed by both his intellect and his emotions.

Rand also depicts the pleasure, or at least the sense of inner satisfaction and fulfillment, that a virtuous person gets from doing the right thing—without forgetting the painful, even tragic, aspects that the choice of the right action can involve. In *Atlas Shrugged*, Francisco's choice to give up Dagny and his work, the things he loves most, perhaps forever, for the sake of joining the strike, is a particularly dramatic example of the agonizing loss that the choice to do the right thing can involve. It is also an example of the serenity and fulfillment attendant on such a choice. On his last night with Dagny, at the height of his despair, Francisco turns to her and begs her to help him refuse Galt's call, "[e]ven though he's right" (AS, 111). By the next morning, however, after he has emerged from his agonized struggle and made his decision, his face shows "both serenity and suffering," and he looks like a man "who sees that which makes the torture worth bearing" (AS, 112).

The veridicality of Rand's portrayal of her ideal characters lends support to Aristotle's conception of virtue, just as the independent plausibility of Aristotle's conception of virtue lends support to Rand's portrayal of her characters. Aristotle's conception of vice—the worst possible state of character—is also illustrated in Rand's fiction. According to Aristotle, vice disposes an individual to feel, deliberate, choose, and act wrongly. Vice blinds a person to the good, and may even reverse his perception of good and bad, so that he sees the good as bad and the bad as good (NE, Bk. III, ch. 4). Vice, says Aristotle in a memorable phrase, is unconscious of itself (NE, 1150b 35).

This conception of vice captures Rand's portrayal of her wholly or partly vicious characters. In *The Fountainhead*, Gail Wynand is time and again shown revealing his lust for power over others without any awareness that what he is revealing is a vice—more precisely, without any awareness that lust for power over others is a vice even if, as he claims, these others are devoid of integrity.

Power, Dominique. The only thing I ever wanted. To know that there's not a man living whom I can't force to do—anything. Anything I choose . . . . They say I have no sense of honor, I've missed something in life. Well, I haven't missed very much, have I? The thing I've missed—it doesn't exist (497).

Rather like a latter-day Thrasy-machus, the anti-moralist in Plato's *Republic*, who sees the ability to be unjust when one can get away with it as a sign of superior strength, Wynand sees his ability to break people's wills as a sign of his self-sufficiency and superiority. And again rather like Thrasy-machus, who "unmasks" justice as simply a ploy of the strong to get the weak to serve their interests, Wynand "unmasks" people's belief in integrity as simply another expression of their dishonesty, interpreting his own cynicism as a sign of his clear-sightedness and honesty (497).

However, contrary to Aristotle's suggestion, the vicious are not *always* unconscious or ignorant of their vice. Sometimes they are aware of their vices as vices, but, as Rand emphasizes, they evade this knowledge, as they evade knowledge of many other facts. Sometimes, again, habitual evasiveness combines with ignorance to put a person at the mercy of his vicious dispositions, which then "break through" and subvert his better intentions, even to his own detriment. Consider again the scene where Keating goes to see Roark to bribe him for remaining silent about his contribution to the Cosmo-Slotnick building. He has "planned the interview to be smooth and friendly," with a manner to match (FH, 191). But he surprises himself by starting off with the words, "What's the matter, Howard? You look like hell. Surely, you're not overworking yourself, from what I hear?" (191). His manner is insultingly familiar and condescending, prompted by his desire to show Roark that he is not afraid of him—a desire that overcomes the intention to conduct the interview smoothly. In Rand's words, "[h]e felt himself rolling down a hill, without brakes. He could not stop." Matters escalate, as the passage quoted earlier shows, and Keating ends up not only failing to conceal his fear of Roark, but confessing it to boot.

### **Emotions and Cognition**

The Aristotelian conception of virtue and vice gives emotion a central role in their constitution. The emotions that partly constitute the virtues not only motivate right action, they also have cognitive power, insofar as they track what is truly valuable. Thus, the courageous person's confidence and fearlessness aid him in seeing which dangers are worth facing for which ends. By contrast, the emotions that partly constitute the vices track what is disvaluable, a spurious image of the good. Thus, the cowardly person's fearfulness and lack of confidence exaggerate the danger, becoming tools of distortion that distort or block the cognitive power of the intellect as well.

Clearly, Rand the novelist, like Aristotle the philosopher, sees the agent's emotional dispositions as a crucial component of his moral character, and as having the power to enhance or distort cognition (see II, 2 and 3 above). But what about Rand the philosopher? Rand's claim that "emotions are not tools of

cognition" (VOS, p. 29) has often been interpreted in a way that contradicts the picture she presents in her novels. However, this claim must be interpreted in the context of another important claim, viz., that "[e]motions are estimates of that which furthers man's values or threatens them, that which is *for* him or *against* him—lightning calculators giving him the sum of his profit or loss" (p. 27). The emotions of someone who wholeheartedly values the truly valuable—truth, reason et al.—will apprise her of what is truly good or bad in particular situations. Since emotions, unlike conscious reasoning, are "lightning" quick, without them she would often act too late or fail to act at all. Again, Rand would agree that since rational emotions, unlike deliberate, conscious reasoning, make available a vast store of evaluative knowledge, in the absence of such emotions a person would simply fail to see certain things. Without rational emotions, then, a person would make mistakes of judgment and act inappropriately or not at all. It is this vast store of knowledge embodied in her emotions that enables Dagny to recognize, "[i]n a single shock of emotion," that Ellis Wyatt's simple greeting signifies "forgiveness, understanding, acknowledgment" (AS, 157). And it is because Dagny knows that her emotions have cognitive power that she can surrender "her consciousness to a single sight and a single, wordless emotion . . . [aware] that what she now felt was the instantaneous total of the thoughts she did not have to name, the final sum of a long progression, like a voice telling her by means of a feeling" (674).

In her fiction, Rand also depicts the power of emotions to affect cognition in ways that are independent of the issue of virtue or vice. Moods and feelings induced by events in one's life, events to which they may be appropriate responses, can affect the way other things appear to one. In a couple of striking scenes in *Atlas Shrugged*, we see Hank Rearden first overcome by disgust at the world around him, a disgust that makes "the city seem sodden to him" (349), and then, on reaching Dagny's apartment, recover his sense of benevolence, a sense that enables him to see the city as a stupendous achievement of human creativity (351). In fact, the city is both sodden in some respects and a great achievement, but Rearden's disgust at the world hides its greatness till he has recovered the proper emotional state, a sense of benevolence.

As this discussion shows, some of Rand's stated views of the emotions, along with her depiction of them in her fiction, imply the view, so central to Aristotle's conception of virtue, that emotions have cognitive power. Hence, the claim that emotions are not tools of cognition must be interpreted to mean that they are not in themselves tools of cognition. Rather, they must be "programmed" by the intellect. As she states, "[m]an's emotional mechanism is like an electronic computer, which his mind has to program—and the programming consists of the values his mind chooses" (VOS, 28).

The idea that the emotions have to be programmed by the intellect, whereas the intellect can choose values independently of any help from the emotions, suggests a hierarchical relationship between intellect and emotion, and a unidirectional picture of moral and psychological development. First the intellect, functioning independently of the emotional faculty, collects the data and makes value-judgments; then it programs the emotional faculty. On this picture, the preprogrammed emotional faculty is inert, unable to make any value responses, and unable to play a fundamental role in forming or aiding the intellect.

However, if infants and young children (not to mention animals) have emotions in a pre-conceptual form—as they surely do—then emotions cannot be entirely dependent on the intellect. We feel fear, anger, contentment, empathy, and pleasure in a pre-conceptual form long before we acquire the capacity to make value-judgements. Insofar as these are responses to that which we sense as somehow good or bad for us, valuable or disvaluable, it follows that we are able to make value *responses* long before we are able to make value-*judgements*. Indeed, it is only because we have this pre-conceptual ability for responding to value that we can acquire the capacity for making value-judgments. Thus, pre-conceptual emotions are necessary for having any more than the most primitive values in the first place, and, thereby, for making value-judgments. Adult emotions build on these pre-conceptual emotions and the value-judgments they make possible. For example, adult fear typically contains not only the components of feeling and physiological response that a child's fear does, but also the value-judgment of the feared object as dangerous or threatening. Which objects are seen as fearful depends not on the judgments of an untouched intellect, but an intellect already shaped to some extent by our pre-conceptual emotions, and continually influenced by, even as it in turn influences, our adult emotions.<sup>15</sup>

Aristotle's picture of moral and psychological development as that of a process in which intellect and emotion grow and mature interdependently, each influencing the other, reflects these facts. It is, therefore, a more adequate account than Rand's hierarchical account of the emotions as programmed by an untouched intellect.

Rand's writings also often suggest that in a conflict between one's emotions and one's intellectual judgement, one must always opt for the latter, that the intellect is always more trustworthy than the emotions. However, we have already seen a counterexample to this in the scene where Dagny finds herself responding to Francisco happily, instead of with the intended coldness. One reason why one's emotional evaluation in a situation may be more trustworthy is that, as Rand herself points out, unlike the intellect, emotions can apprise us of a vast amount of evaluative knowledge. Given this, whether one should opt for the deliverances of one's emotions in a particular situation, or for one's intellectual judgement, depends on the general reliability of one's emotions vis-a-vis one's intellect in that sort of situation. The issue cannot be decided simply by appeal to a hierarchical relationship between intellect and emotion (even should this picture of a hierarchical relationship be correct). Indeed, some of the psychological nuances and complexities of Dominique's and Roark's relationships with Gail Wynand can be understood only as the result of each of them allowing their emotional responses to challenge their intellectual judgments. Consider the passage in which Dominique urges Wynand—the man who stands for everything she despises—to fire Ellsworth Toohey, because he is a threat to Wynand's beloved *Banner*—the paper that caters to everything she despises.

Gail, when I married you, I didn't know I'd come to feel this kind of loyalty to you. It contradicts everything I've done, it contradicts so much more than I can tell you—it's a sort of catastrophe for me, a turning point—don't ask me

why—it will take me years to understand—I know only that this is what I owe you (499-500).

She allows her feeling of loyalty to Wynand to dictate her action, even though she cannot quite understand why she feels this loyalty to him; she “knows” she “owes” him this warning, even though she cannot quite understand why she should want his paper saved. The fact that Wynand is an “innocent weapon” compared to Toohey, who is “a corrosive gas . . . the kind that eats lungs out” (500), neither justifies Dominique’s feeling of loyalty, nor supports her claim to “know” that she “owes” Wynand a warning. After all, even if Wynand is innocent compared to Toohey, his record of destruction can still only be classified as unambiguously evil. We can understand Dominique’s actions and words only if we interpret her as trusting her emotions to tell her something her intellect alone cannot yet grasp.

To reiterate: Rand’s depiction of virtuous individuals, and of the role of emotion in virtuous action, in her novels is closer to Aristotle’s views of these matters than her own stated views. But what about her conception of happiness, and of its relationship to virtue? It is to this question that I will now turn.

## HAPPINESS

### Rand’s Definition(s) of Happiness

(i) “Happiness is that state of consciousness which proceeds from the achievement of one’s values” (VOS, 28).

The values in question are rational values. “If you achieve that which is the good by a rational standard of value, it will necessarily make you happy; but that which makes you happy, by some undefined emotional standard, is not necessarily the good” (VOS, 29). (The implication of the second clause, that it is possible to be happy even if one’s values are irrational, is later taken back, so I will simply ignore it.)

(ii) “Happiness is a state of non-contradictory joy—a joy without penalty or guilt, a joy that does not clash with any of your values and does not work for your own destruction . . . .” Rand continues: “[h]appiness is possible only to a rational man, the man who desires nothing but rational goals, seeks nothing but rational values and finds his joy in nothing but rational actions” (29).

These definitions make two important points:

- (1) Happiness is a state of consciousness.
- (2) It is a positive, harmonious (non-contradictory) state of consciousness that results from the achievement of one’s rational values, and only from such values.

Rand also gives a less mentalistic definition of happiness in VOS.

(iii) “Happiness is the successful state of life” (27). More fully, “[t]he maintenance of life and the pursuit of happiness are not two separate issues . . . [but] two aspects of the same

achievement. Existentially, the activity of pursuing rational goals is the activity of maintaining one's life; psychologically, its result, reward and concomitant is an emotional state of happiness" (29).

Putting these thoughts together, we can say that, for Rand, happiness is a successful state of life, and the positive state of consciousness that accompanies and results from such a life.

The values Rand has in mind when she says that happiness results from the achievement of one's rational values are existential or external values or life-goals, most importantly, career and romantic love. Thus, when she says that *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* have happy endings, and *We the Living* a tragic ending, she means that *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* end with the success of her protagonists in achieving their most important life-goals through rational (moral) action: succeeding at least in their careers, but also, in the case of the most important characters, in their romantic attachments. And when she says that *We the Living* has a tragic ending, she means that her protagonists fail to achieve their most important life-goals. This is, of course, in keeping with the usual understanding of a happy or tragic ending. What is noteworthy is that Rand gives no hint that she regards spiritual success in the absence of existential success—i.e., success in remaining true to one's rational values in the face of existential failure—as constituting any part of happiness. If she had, then she would have acknowledged that *We the Living* was not entirely a tragedy. After all, in this novel only Leo is destroyed spiritually; Kira triumphs, and Andrei learns the meaning of love and individuality. Elsewhere, too, as we have seen, Rand equates a happy or successful life with a life in which we achieve our rational external values through virtuous action.

On this conception of happiness—the conception standardly accepted in interpretations of her views—virtue is only a means to happiness. Yet many of her claims—as also her portrayal of her characters—imply a different view, the view that a life in which we fail to achieve our most important external values, but still continue to act honestly, justly, and with integrity, is also to some extent a successful and, therefore, happy life. In other words, many of her claims imply the Aristotelian view that a virtuous life is partly *constitutive* of a happy life. The most important texts supporting this view are the ones that deal with Rand's conception of the most important values and their connection to happiness.

As we have already seen, the cardinal values, the values that are expressed by the cardinal virtues, are the largely psychological or "internal" higher-order values of reason, purpose, and self-esteem. As she makes clear, to truly value reason is to have a commitment to living rationally, and (presumably) to derive pleasure from living rationally. Likewise, to truly value having a purpose is to have a commitment to living a life of productive activity, and to derive pleasure from living productively. The cardinal virtues of rationality and of productiveness, then, are exercised in rational and productive activity that is motivated in this wholehearted way by the value of reason and purposiveness. And it is in a life characterized by the virtues of rationality and productivity that one maintains and expresses love of reason and purposiveness. The third cardinal

value, a sense of self-esteem, is the sense of oneself as being *able* to achieve happiness and being worthy of happiness (AS, 936, FNI, 128). Hence, someone who truly values self-esteem will continually strive to become—and remain—the sort of person who is both capable of happiness and *worthy* of happiness. The virtue necessary for self-esteem, says Rand, is the virtue of pride or *moral ambitiousness*, the virtue of acting to achieve one's own moral perfection (VOS, 27). Only by acting to perfect ourselves can we achieve and maintain self-esteem, and only by valuing self-esteem will we be motivated to act with pride. It is in a life characterized by the virtue of pride, then, that one expresses the value one places on self-esteem.

It follows that, so long as one can act virtuously, one is guaranteed success at achieving or maintaining the three supreme values—reason, purpose, and self-esteem—regardless of success or failure in achieving one's external values. So, if happiness is a successful state of life, then such "inner" success must count not only as a necessary *means* to happiness, but as itself a major *part* of happiness. I will refer to the life of merely inner success as a life of partial or "inner" happiness, and the life of both inner and outer success as full happiness. Images of both partial and full happiness occur in several passages in Rand's novels.

### **Images of Happiness in Rand's Novels**

#### (i) Partial happiness

Roark in the quarry (*The Fountainhead*): Roark's months in the quarry are shot through with pain—pain at the loss of the opportunity to be doing the thing he loves. Yet he is not entirely unhappy. His consciousness of having done the right thing in refusing to build buildings that violate his architectural principles, and his sense of purpose in being engaged in a "clean," worthwhile activity in the quarry, impart to his life a certain serenity and quiet satisfaction that are part of happiness.

Francisco after he has given up Dagny and his work, and decided to assume a new persona for the public (*Atlas Shrugged*): After his initial tortured struggle, when he begs Dagny to help him to refuse John Galt's call to "strike" and to stay with her, Francisco achieves a measure of serenity in the knowledge that his renunciation of his life-goals is necessary for a deeper and longer-lasting success. His house in Galt's Gulch serves as a splendid metaphor for his state of mind in those years of painful renunciation: the "silent, locked exterior" of the house bespeaks sorrow and loneliness—the interior is filled with an "invigorating brightness" (AS, 710).

Interestingly, Peikoff also draws on these facts about the psychology of Rand's heroes to come to the conclusion that "[v]irtue does ensure happiness in a certain sense, just as it ensures practicality" (*Objectivism*, 339), "not the full happiness of having achieved one's values in reality, but the premonitory radiance of knowing that such achievement is possible" (340). Indeed, Peikoff puts it even more strongly—and somewhat misleadingly—when he says that someone like Roark is "a happy person even when living through an unhappy period" (339-400). He distinguishes between the achievement of existential and philosophical values, and between full happiness and "happiness in a certain

sense,” or “metaphysical pleasure” (340). Yet he denies that “the achievement of philosophical values,” reason, purpose, and self-esteem, which we achieve and maintain only through virtue, constitutes a form of success, describing it instead as the achievement of “the ability to succeed.” However, if achieving and maintaining the cardinal values and virtue is not a form of success, but success is necessary to happiness, then it is hard to see how virtue can “ensure happiness” in any sense of the word. To consistently maintain the thesis that virtue ensures happiness “in a certain sense,” Peikoff would have to reject the canonical view that equates happiness with the state of consciousness that results from existential success, and sees virtue as entirely a means to happiness. But this should not be a problem. For, as we have seen, some of Rand’s own theoretical statements imply the rejection of the canonical view, and her fiction constitutes a powerful argument in support of this rejection.

### **(ii) Full happiness**

Dagny and Francisco in the early days of their relationship, before he (apparently) turns into a playboy and their relationship comes to an end: The description of her state of mind after her first sexual encounter with Francisco is a good example of full happiness. “[W]hen she thought that she would not sleep . . . her last thought was of the times when she had wanted to express, but found no way to do it, an instant’s knowledge of a feeling greater than happiness, the feeling of one’s blessing upon the whole of the earth, the feeling of being in love with the fact that one exists and in this kind of world” (AS, 105-6).

Dominique and Roark after they are united and he has become a successful architect. The passage that captures her happiness best, however, occurs shortly before this, when she decides to leave Wynand and go back to Roark—and the world she has rejected out of fear and disgust.

Dominique lay stretched out on the shore of the lake . . . Flat on her back, hands crossed under her head, she studied the motion of leaves against the sky. It was an earnest occupation, giving her full contentment. She thought, it’s a lovely kind of green . . . The fire around the edges is the sun . . . The spots of light weaving in circles—that’s the lake . . . the lake is beautiful today . . . I have never been able to enjoy it before, the sight of the earth . . . I thought of those who owned it and then it hurt me too much. I can love it now. They don’t own it . . . The earth is beautiful . . . (FH, 665-66).

She thought, I’ve learned to bear anything except happiness. I must learn how to carry it. How not to break under it (666).

## CONCLUSION

We have seen that Rand's views about the three supreme values and the virtues required for them leads to the view that virtuous activity is itself partly constitutive of happiness. For on this view virtuous activity is both a means to, and an expression or realization of, the three supreme values—reason, purpose, and self-esteem—and these values are both the means to, and the realization of, one's ultimate value, happiness. More formally:

1. Virtuous activity is both a means to, and realization of, the supreme values.
2. These values are both a means to, and realization of, an important part of happiness.
3. Hence, virtuous activity is also both a means to, and realization of, an important part of happiness.

Virtuous activity is inherently deeply satisfying or happiness-making. That is, the satisfaction that comes from virtuous activity is "embedded" in it the way the pleasure that comes from walking along the beach is embedded in the activity. The passages from Rand's novels discussed above show why this is so. In acting virtuously and, thereby, aiming at, and expressing, our values, we actualize a clear-sighted view of our selves and of external reality. A virtuous life thus brings with it a sense of harmony and of freedom—a justified sense of efficacy, of the power of one's agency to deal with external obstacles. It is this sort of enduring reality-oriented pleasure and deep satisfaction that is an essential and central part of happiness. It is only when we cease to act virtuously that we lose happiness altogether. Henry Cameron and Steven Mallory, minor characters in *The Fountainhead*, are examples of individuals who allow their existential failures to damage their inner resources, their capacity for virtuous action. When first introduced to the reader, they are shown as bitter, self-destructive individuals, who are rescued from this state only with Roark's help and kindness. It is also, of course, possible to never develop one's inner resources and, therefore, to never achieve happiness. Keating is a case in point.

Insofar as the virtues are a constitutive part of happiness, they are ends in themselves. But they are also, of course, means to happiness. As traits and acts that put us in the best state to achieve and maintain a successful state of life, they aim at bringing about certain states of affairs in the world. For example, the aim of being just is to bring about just states of affairs. But success in doing this often depends on circumstances that are independent of the agent's actions. Thus, the success of a judge in acquitting an innocent defendant depends not only on his acting justly himself, but also on the others involved acting justly and efficiently, as well as on luck in gathering the evidence. In short, because virtuous action is a means to external success, and because external success is essential to full happiness, virtuous action is also a means to happiness.

It is because it has this instrumental relationship to happiness that virtue is never sufficient for full happiness. For it is possible to act virtuously, yet fail, through misfortune, to achieve one's most important goals. Such a life, though (necessarily) not unhappy, is not fully happy either. An unqualifiedly happy life is one in which one's actions are largely rewarded by success, and one's sense of satisfaction in one's life is partly derived from this success.

## NOTES:

1. This paper was first written for a talk at the Institute for Objectivist Studies Summer Seminar in July 1997. I would like to thank the IOS for the opportunity to present it, Lester Hunt, David Kelley, and Chris Swoyer for their helpful written comments, and Larry Abrams and Murray Franck for taking the time to read it and discuss it with me.
2. Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* (AS), 35th Anniversary Edition (New York: Signet, 1957), 939, *For the New Intellectual* (FNI) (New York: Signet), 131.
3. Leonard Peikoff, *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* (New York: Meridian, 1991), 328. See also David Kelley, *Unrugged Individualism: The Selfish Basis of Benevolence* (New York: Institute for Objectivist Studies, 1996), for an entirely instrumentalist defense of the virtue of benevolence.
4. In "Flourishing Egoism," Lester Hunt takes a stronger position, arguing that in Rand's ethics the virtues are constitutive of happiness, or "an essential part of it" (*Social Philosophy and Policy*, eds. E.F. Paul, F. Miller, and J. Paul, Vol. 16, 1, Winter 1999), 93. My view, as stated above, is that although this idea is implicit in her writings, her official view is different. Hunt and I also develop very different (though largely compatible) lines of argument for the claim that the constitutive view is to be found in Rand. Whereas there are some other philosophers who would agree with this claim as part of a broadly Aristotelian interpretation of Rand's ethics (see, for example, Tibor Machan, *Ayn Rand* [New York: Peter Lang, 1999]), no one else actually argues for it.
5. AS, 930, "The Objectivist Ethics," *The Virtue of Selfishness* (VOS) (New York: Signet, 1961), 27.
6. More precisely, it is a means in normal circumstances. An act of resistance to tyranny in the cause of justice, but without the expectation of furthering this cause, is only an expression of certain values, not a means to any.
7. I discuss Rand's conception of happiness below, pp. 44-46.
8. This interpretation is also supported by these words of Francisco to Dagny: "[e]very form of happiness is one, every desire is driven by the same motor—by our love for a single value, for the highest potentiality of our own existence—and every achievement is an expression of it" (AS, 708). I take this to mean that every achievement is an expression of our love for, and desire to realize, our highest potential, and happiness consists of doing so. The idea that happiness lies in self-realization is not often (if at all) voiced in Rand's philosophical writings, but it is often illustrated in her novels. Thanks to David Kelley for bringing this passage to my attention.
9. There is a reference to character in the definition of the virtue of pride (AS, 938, FNI, 130), but here, too, character is that which pride aims to build; pride itself is not said to be a character trait.
10. The problem goes deeper than this, for it affects not only moral response, but all belief and all action. As Ronald de Sousa argues in *The Rationality of Emotion* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), no amount of knowledge or degree of logical and inductive acumen would enable us to solve the "frame problem," i.e., the problem of knowing what is relevant, what irrelevant, in the mass of data on the basis of which we make inferences, form beliefs, and decide on action (192-96). To solve the frame problem, we need emotions. In *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain* (New York: Grosset/Putnam, 1994), the neurologist Antonio Damasio discusses patients with high IQs but impaired emotional faculties who are unable to make the simplest of decisions. One patient is unable to choose an appointment time with Damasio because he can give countless arguments for and against any time that Damasio proposes. According to Damasio, such people have lost their "somatic markers," or gut feelings, that tell us that certain courses of action are good for us, others bad. See Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (EI) (New York: Bantam, 1995), 27-29, 52-54 for an excellent discussion of Damasio's work as well as of the neurological, psychological, and biological research on the emotions.
11. Hervey Cleckley, *The Mask of Sanity* (St. Louis: C.V. Mosby, 1964), argues that the psychopath's failure to be a moral agent is due to the fact that his stunted emotional capacity renders him incapable of seeing the significance of things.
12. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (NE), tr. Terence I. Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1985), 1106b36-1107a2.
13. *The Fountainhead* (FH), 50th Anniversary Edition (New York: Signet, 1971), 191-92.
14. There is a suggestion in the text that Rand thinks that the city is seen veridically only when it is seen as an achievement, and not also as sodden. But my interpretation is both compatible with the text and more accurate as a description of the city.
15. Some of the best evidence for the importance of normal emotional development to normal intellectual development comes from studies of autism. Autistic people show an inability to understand complex personal relationships and emotional nuances due to neurological abnormalities that prevent normal emotional development. See Temple Grandin's autobiographical account in *Thinking in Pictures* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), especially ch. 4, "Learning Empathy."
16. Elsewhere I have also argued that virtuous activities and attitudes are partly constitutive of certain external goods, such as friendship (see my "Friendship, Justice and Supererogation," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, V. 22, 2, April 1985, pp. 123-131.) Thus, the virtues of benevolence and of justice are partly constitutive of the best (i.e., most enduring, meaningful, and fulfilling) friendships. If friendship is a means to happiness, then it follows that virtue is a means to happiness in yet another way.