

The Place of the Non-Initiation of Force Principle in Ayn Rand's Philosophy

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Toward the end of her seminal essay “The Objectivist Ethics,” Ayn Rand states the following: “The basic political principle of the Objectivist Ethics is: no man may *initiate* the use of physical force against others. No man—or group or society or government—has the right to assume the role of a criminal and initiate the use of physical compulsion against any man. Men have the right to use physical force *only* in retaliation and *only* against those who initiate its use” (VOS 36; original emphasis). Let us call this the non-initiation of force principle.¹ The principle encompasses both the ban on initiated force and the (specifically limited) authorization of retaliatory force against initiators. Although this is Rand’s basic political principle, the passage makes it clear that the principle’s scope is wider than politics. It applies not only to the actions of government and the organization of societies but also, and equally, to the actions of individuals

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1. For reasons that will be made clear later, I do not refer to this as the nonaggression principle, the standard designation of the core principle of libertarianism (from which movement Rand dissociated herself).

and groups both inside and outside of organized societies.² It is the basic political principle, for Rand, because it is in some sense the foundation of all her specifically political arguments and conclusions: not their ultimate foundation but, as we might put it, their proximal foundation—the principle nearest to politics, but wider than politics, on which (along with all of the other, deeper principles in Rand’s philosophy) her political philosophy rests. The other principles that seem foundational in Rand’s political philosophy are those involved in her account of individual rights. I will discuss the relation of that account to the non–initiation of force principle below.

The non–initiation of force principle itself raises a number of questions. How should it be understood? What specific kinds of actions does it prohibit? What is its justification in Rand’s thought? Why is force coercive, and are there other forms of coercion, such as economic coercion? Why does Rand insist on the need for a complete ban on the initiation of physical force within human relationships, to the extent of prohibiting even many government actions that are widely regarded as legitimate, even essential, and whose status as initiations of force is controversial, such as economic regulation or redistribution? How is her principle related to the “nonaggression principle” espoused by libertarians? It would require a full-length book to do justice to all these questions, but in this chapter and the two that follow I will touch on all of them and extensively explore the core of her justification for the non–initiation of force principle.

Since Rand’s approach to philosophy is holistic, a proper understanding of the principle requires us to see how it grows out of her more fundamental positions in ethics and epistemology, and this is my subject in the present chapter. Specifically, I aim to show how this principle is based in her ethics and relies on an account of the intellectual consequences of force that is shaped by her epistemological views. Accordingly, I will start by summarizing key themes from her ethics and eliciting her core argument for the main (prohibitory) part of the non–initiation of force principle. I go on to examine issues in her epistemology and end by exploring

2. I base this interpretation on the fact that Rand does not restrict the principle’s scope by saying, for instance, that it only applies to governments or only within society. Peikoff acknowledges the principle’s wide scope and fundamental status by discussing it in conjunction with Rand’s theory of moral virtue, which in Rand’s thought is epistemically prior to her political philosophy. See Peikoff 1991, 310–24.

Rand's conception of initiatory force, and some of the main forms that force can take. This exploration raises questions about the effects of force on the mind and about the scope of the non-initiation of force principle, which I discuss in the next two chapters, respectively.

1. Rand's Justification of Moral Principles

The non-initiation of force principle is a moral principle, for Rand. So let us consider how, in general, she justifies moral principles; and how, more particularly, she justifies moral principles pertaining to our treatment of others. Not all moral principles are other-directed, in her view, but some are, and this one clearly is.

On Rand's view, moral evaluation has a teleological basis. We elucidate that basis by asking why moral values are *necessary* for us. In the deepest sense, Rand holds, the need for moral values derives from the fact that we are *living organisms* of a particular kind. All living organisms must pursue specific *values*—specific goals, appropriate to their nature and needs—in order to maintain their lives; a living organism exists through goal-directed action. This is true even for plants, although their goal pursuit is not conscious and purposive, as it is for animals. Our similar need to pursue specific values in order to live is the ultimate basis, according to Rand, for all of the values and forms of evaluation that figure into our lives.

Living organisms as such do not pursue moral values, of course, nor could they. An animal relies on instinctual knowledge and values to act successfully within its environment; for example, to recognize and pursue its appropriate food and to recognize and evade predators. Further, not only does an animal's consciousness equip it with automatic values pertaining to its actions in the world but the functioning of its consciousness is itself governed by certain automatic values, in the sense that, by nature, the animal is motivated to attend to its environment and act on what it perceives; it cannot choose not to do these things. Rand writes that an animal's senses "provide it with an *automatic* code of values, an automatic knowledge of what is good for it or evil, what benefits or endangers its life. An animal has no power to extend its knowledge or to evade it. In situations for which its knowledge is inadequate, it perishes. . . . But so long as it lives, an animal acts on its knowledge, with automatic safety and no power of choice: it cannot suspend its own consciousness—it cannot choose *not* to perceive—it cannot evade its own perceptions—it can-

not ignore its own good” (*VOS* 20; original emphasis). An animal cannot evade the knowledge, or act against the values, that its nature equips it with. It has no ability to act on a momentary whim, to drift purposelessly, to surrender its good in a moment of cowardice, or to neglect the work its life requires, such as seeking food or building a nest. Its genetic programming automatically maintains the right kind of relation between its consciousness and reality, setting it on a reality-oriented, purposive, consistent course, suited for maintaining the animal’s life across its lifespan. External factors can threaten or destroy it, but within its power, the animal by nature does its best for itself.³

The integrity of the relation between an animal’s consciousness and reality is protected by its genetic coding. But human consciousness, according to Rand, is volitional. Its functioning is not determined by our genetics (though its capacities and the requirements of its proper functioning are). We must create the equivalent state in ourselves—in our souls—a state that can underwrite the basic kinds of cognitive and existential actions that our lives require over their entire span. This, according to Rand, is the proper function of a moral code. Moral virtues (or principles), she says, “pertain to the relation of existence and consciousness” (*Atlas* 1018).⁴ Fundamentally, Rand holds, it is our moral code that either enables us to project, produce, and achieve the range of other values, material and spiritual, that we need in our lives or prevents us from doing so.⁵

3. This might seem to ignore the so-called altruistic aspects of much animal behavior. Properly understood, however, I do not think the behavior referred to by that term contradicts any of Rand’s claims about the ways in which animals function. In my view, at least for most species of animals, there is no real distinction to be made between the interests of an individual animal and the interests of its kind (species, subpopulation, or whatever the reference group might be, in a given case, for the other-regarding behavior that people have in mind by the term “altruism”). A seagull acts as a member of its kind and seeks what is good for a standard member of its kind.

4. Although she frames her ethics partly in terms of certain virtues, Rand does not make a sharp separation between virtues and principles. The virtues are specified in terms of principles, and people’s characters depend most basically on the principles they are committed to. See *Atlas* 1018–21, and “The Objectivist Ethics,” *VOS* 27–30 (on virtues); “Causality versus Duty,” *PWNI* 133 and *ITOE* 33 (on moral principles).

5. Rand uses the terms “morality” and “ethics” interchangeably. In the narrower sense of “moral” in which Bernard Williams criticizes morality, the terms are not interchangeable, and her ethics rejects some of the features that Williams associates with what he calls “the morality system” (see Williams 1985, 177 and ch. 10). But she does not reject everything that has been identified with this narrower sense of moral. For example, she is perfectly at home speaking of moral laws—which she interprets as rational principles hypothetically linked to

Let us now consider, more specifically, Rand's views of the role of principles in ethics. Principles, in her view, are necessary for evaluating specific actions. In some sense every normative ethical theory must agree with this. We evaluate an action by bringing it under whatever principles the theory proposes as the criterion of right and wrong. Even if what is right depends, say, on what the virtuous person would do in a particular situation, this is a kind of principle.

But Rand makes a more specific claim about the need for principles. All normative ethical theories must have some overall criterion of right and wrong. But the status of secondary principles that are subordinate to this overall criterion has been contentious in teleological theories. On some views, such principles are at best rules of thumb that can be overridden by judgments about particular cases. What Rand claims, however, is that, even though the basis of her ethics is teleological, we have no way of evaluating the relation of a given action to the ultimate end independently of secondary principles. There is no way for us to simply inspect the action and determine straightaway how it relates to our lives. In order to do that, we first require broad teleological principles pertaining to the fundamental requirements of any human being's life. Since these requirements, as Rand conceives them, are moral requirements, the basic principles that we require are moral ones.

Moral principles enable us to grasp the long-range tendencies of specific ways of functioning cognitively and existentially. They provide a framework for constituting one's life so that it will be self-sustaining. In evaluating an action *morally*, the concern is not with its specific effects but with how well it fits into such a framework.

For Rand, moral principles maintain our lives in another respect also. They are a precondition of the self-esteem that one needs in order to live.⁶ Animals value themselves automatically, by virtue of being constituted to act self-sustainingly. But human beings do not; self-loathing is possible for us. What determines self-esteem, according to Rand, is whether one's life fits one's own conception of a properly human life and whether that conception is grounded in the facts of human nature in such

the long-range requirements of a person's life—and her ethics includes conceptions of moral goodness and evil that do not reduce to the contrast between the admirable and the base but include a willful, deliberate element under the agent's direct control. Like other theorists of morality in Williams's pejorative sense, Rand sees morality/ethics as carving out a sphere of evaluation that is, in Williams's words, "immune to luck" (Williams 1981, 20).

6. On the need for self-esteem, see *Atlas* 1056–57.

a way that it can withstand the test of its being put into practice. Your self-esteem will suffer if you recognize yourself as acting against your accepted (perhaps implicitly so) moral principles or if you act on principles that you profess to accept but cannot honestly endorse, in view of their actual consequences.

The justification of specific moral principles, according to Rand, must proceed by reference to a developed account of human nature. Since the justification of the non-initiation of force principle will rely on some of this ethical content, I will briefly sketch some key elements of her account and the principles they lead to. She holds that reason—conceptual thought—is our means of survival; we must use our minds to develop the knowledge and values that our lives require, and to guide all aspects of our lives. Further, the values we require include material values, and these must be both envisioned and produced, a process that requires rational thought and purposive action at every stage and is central to a properly human form of existence.

Besides providing for our material needs, in Rand's view, rational productive activity satisfies crucial spiritual needs. Psychologically, one's basic choice is the choice to think—to activate one's mind purposively: "The choice to think or not is volitional [that is, under one's direct and immediate control, and non-necessitated]. If an individual's choice is predominantly negative, the result is his self-arrested mental development, a self-made cognitive malnutrition, a stagnant, eroded, impoverished, anxiety-ridden inner life" ("Our Cultural Value-Deprivation," *VOR* 102). If, on the other hand, one's choice is positive, one experiences a sense of control and mastery and a sense of self-esteem that flows from one's implicit awareness of oneself as functioning in humanly appropriate ways (that is, on humanly appropriate principles).

For a conceptual being, the activity of living has directly experienced spiritual value. Rand's term for this value is joy—and when it is a stable and lasting undertone of one's life, happiness. One achieves this value by living in accordance with the long-range requirements of one's survival; the individual she describes in the passage above is precluded from accessing it. In Rand's view, it is the spiritual value of living that provides the motive to live and the purpose of living. Material survival is not an end in itself for us, apart from the spiritual purposes to which it is directed; it is not an end one could choose for its own sake. Unless one could experience one's life as a value, the choice to live would be purposeless.

But choice, for Rand, always requires a purpose to motivate and direct it.⁷ Material survival can be valued only as integral to (and, in that sense, for the sake of) happiness, and rational productive activity is important for us not only because it secures our material well-being but because it is the foundation of happiness.

Rand elaborates this point in answering a question about why a wealthy entrepreneur should continue to work:

When I say man survives by means of his mind, I mean that man's first moral virtue is to think and to be productive. That is not the same as saying: "Get your pile of money by hook or by crook, and then sit at home and enjoy it." You assume rational self-interest is simply ensuring one's physical luxury. But what would a man do with himself once he has those millions. He would stagnate. No man who has used his mind enough to achieve a fortune is going to be happy doing nothing. His self-interest does not lie in consumption but in production—in the creative expansion of his mind.

To go deeper, observe that in order to exist, every part of an organism must function; if it doesn't, it atrophies. This applies to a man's mind more than to any other faculty. In order actually to be alive properly, a man must use his mind constantly and productively. That's why rationality is the basic virtue according to my morality. Every achievement is an incentive for the next achievement. What for? The creative happiness of achieving greater and greater control over reality, greater and more ambitious values in whatever field a man is using his mind. . . .

Man's survival is not about having to think in order to survive physically for this moment. To survive properly, man must think constantly. Man cannot survive automatically. The day he decides he no longer needs to be creative is the day he's dead spiritually. (*Answers* 29–30)

The above gives us some of the grounds for Rand's claim that rationality and productiveness are cardinal moral virtues, which express and maintain the moral values of reason and purpose. In her view, a principled approach to human survival must begin by recognizing these values and virtues. She characterizes these virtues, in part, as follows:

7. She discusses the relation of choice and purpose in the question-and-answer period following a lecture presenting a version of her essay "The Objectivist Ethics." The recording is available from the Ayn Rand Institute eStore. The relevant answer begins at 1:06:46. Her comments about choice begin at 1:08:22.

The virtue of *Rationality* means the recognition and acceptance of reason as one's only source of knowledge, one's only judge of values and one's only guide to action. It means one's total commitment to a state of full, conscious awareness, to the maintenance of a full mental focus in all issues, in all choices, in all of one's waking hours. It means a commitment to the fullest perception of reality within one's power and to the constant, active expansion of one's perception, *i.e.*, of one's knowledge. It means a commitment to the reality of one's own existence, *i.e.*, to the principle that all of one's goals, values and actions take place in reality and, therefore, that one must never place any value or consideration whatsoever above one's perception of reality. ("The Objectivist Ethics," VOS 28)

Productiveness is your acceptance of morality, your recognition of the fact that you choose to live—that productive work is the process by which man's consciousness controls his existence, a constant process of acquiring knowledge and shaping matter to fit one's purpose, of translating an idea into physical form, of remaking the earth in the image of one's values—that *all* work is creative work if done by a thinking mind, and no work is creative if done by a blank who repeats in uncritical stupor a routine he has learned from others—that your work is yours to choose, and the choice is as wide as your mind, that nothing more is possible to you and nothing less is human—that to cheat your way into a job bigger than your mind can handle is to become a fear-corroded ape on borrowed motions and borrowed time, and to settle down into a job that requires less than your mind's full capacity is to cut your motor and sentence yourself to another kind of motion: decay—that your work is the process of achieving your values, and to lose your ambition for values is to lose your ambition to live. (*Atlas* 1020)

Rationality, as Rand views it, is not incompatible with spontaneity and emotion, but it does require that these be informed and guided by a background of rational judgment. To simply surrender reason, to any extent, is to act blindly. Productiveness does not require constant work, but it requires a purposive approach to life and full use of one's mind; it requires that one seek to grow, both intellectually and in the range and caliber of one's activities.⁸ The primary vice, for Rand, is irrationality and, particularly, any form of psychological evasion—of refusing to recognize salient facts, or attempting to distort them:

8. See, in this connection, *Atlas* 721–22.

[Man's] basic vice, the source of all his evils, is that nameless act which all of you practice, but struggle never to admit: the act of blanking out, the willful suspension of one's consciousness, the refusal to think—not blindness, but the refusal to see; not ignorance, but the refusal to know. It is the act of unfocusing your mind and inducing an inner fog to escape the responsibility of judgment—on the unstated premise that a thing will not exist if only you refuse to identify it, that A will not be A so long as you do not pronounce the verdict “It is.” (*Atlas* 1017)

In formulating moral principles, we must suppose a context in which those principles are substantially reciprocated and set the terms for the functioning of a society. That is, we could not invalidate a principle requiring productiveness by noting that productive people fare badly in a totalitarian dictatorship since they are exploited and expropriated, whereas unproductive people will receive their rations anyway. The primary question of interest pertains to the basic at-large requirements of human survival. Discussion of emergencies or other extreme kinds of nonideal contexts, for Rand, must follow an inquiry into this primary question. The same applies to free riding; we must know the primary principles—the principles that even a free rider depends on some critical mass of others choosing to follow—in order to address that issue.

But the issue of free riding does deserve comment here, since it arises in regard to force. Productiveness may be the best principle overall, but in a society of productive people might one, as an individual, perhaps do better for oneself by free riding on others' efforts in some way or another, through conniving financial schemes, Mafioso tactics, or whatever? Mightn't some people, for instance, be able to live a wealthier and more luxurious life by such means than they otherwise could? Here I want to say something about Rand's *method* of approaching this kind of question.

This looks like a question being asked from argumentatively neutral territory. Mightn't free riding be the best way to get what one wants and needs in life? Perhaps not, but perhaps so—we must find out which. No questions seem to have been begged in raising the issue. But that's not quite true, because the framing of the issue at least comes very close to assuming that the items sought by free riders really do have value for them, with the issue being whether their means of acquiring those values are the best ones available. But this is a substantive assumption, and one that Rand, at least, rejects. On her view, the items do not have value for the free riders simply because they want them, and if they want them, say, to

prove to themselves and others that they are “just as good as those rich bastards who think they’re so smart,” or for the sheer pleasure of denting someone else’s achievements, then these items are certainly not good for the free riders, for they would fuel their character defects and play into an ultimately self-destructive way of functioning.

The usual way of posing the question about free riders assumes that the value of something, for a person, is independent of the means by which it is acquired. In Rand’s view, however, something’s value depends on its relation to moral principles, and to that extent depends on the means of its acquisition.⁹ Something functions as a value for a person only if that person pursues and utilizes it in the course of a self-sustaining process of action. Moral principles specify the essential requirements of such a process for human beings. So, on the one hand, an item will have value for a person only if it is gained and kept by moral means; the assessment of value is dependent on a correct theory of morality. And, on the other hand, when we consider a moral question such as whether it is permissible for one to gain a given item by a certain means (say, by theft), the value of the particular item to oneself *in that action context* cannot be presupposed. For the question being asked is whether theft can be part of the process by which human beings successfully gain and benefit from values. To assume the item’s value on the way to answering this question is to beg the question.

So it cannot be assumed that the specific items the free riders want (such as wealth and luxuries) are good for them. It must be asked whether their way of pursuing those things has a place in a *type of life* that is good for them, and this for Rand comes down to whether it is a life that can actually sustain them. If such a life requires the virtue of productiveness, then the answer to this question is clearly “no.” But is this virtue necessary for everyone? It is true that there must be a critical mass of people who produce what the free rider seeks to consume, or else free riding cannot be a viable means of existence. It might also be said, as Rand does, that free riders eventually destroy their victims and thereby themselves—that this is the long-range tendency of their actions. But the deeper issue,

9. She applies this perspective to the virtue of honesty at *Atlas* 1019. She applies the same kind of analysis to questions of public policy in her essay “Collectivized Ethics” (VOS 93–99). Below, I discuss further Rand’s view of moral principles and her conceptions of objective value and evaluation.

in Rand's view, is that free riders depend on what she calls the "sanction of the victim," the victims' acceptance of a moral code that legitimizes the free rider's exploitative activities. The code that serves this purpose, according to Rand, is "altruism," understood as a moral view that denigrates the pursuit of self-interest and requires sacrifice of self for others.¹⁰ The acceptance of altruism, she holds, is what causes the productive members of society to tolerate legalized control and expropriation by the state for the purported benefit of those in need. (We will return to this point below, in connection with Rand's discussion of the non-initiation of force principle.) So if we are not to act blindly, with no way of grasping the long-term significance of our actions for our lives, we must reject the life of free riding. A society of morally confident productive individuals, who value their own lives and property, has no problem making crime a bad bargain for the perpetrators. And if society's members consider self-interested productive activity paradigmatically moral, as her ethical theory encourages them to do, then they will not accept legalized expropriation by the state. Even in the short run, then, free riders' success depends on their victims' inability to recognize their own moral stature—that is, their inability to recognize their own virtues as such, as well as their rejection of their moral right to live for their own sake (the very goal that purportedly underlies the free rider's own actions). In the absence of the sanction of the victim, Rand holds, the free rider's form of life cannot succeed even in the short term.¹¹

These points shed light on Rand's egoism also. The sense in which she holds that it is in one's self-interest to be moral is that it is in one's interests as a human being; and in order to live a viable life each of us must define our own specific interests and values according to that standard—the principled, long-range requirements of a human life as such. Rand does not try to show the free riders (taking them and their values *just as they are*) that morality is good for them; what she tells them is that they had better change the way in which they value things and change themselves—change their basic way of functioning—if they want to live.

10. On Rand's use of the concept of "sacrifice," see "The Ethics of Emergencies" (VOS 49–56). On her use of altruism, see "Faith and Force: Destroyers of the Modern World," *PWNI* 83–84; also Salmieri 2016c, 136–41; Wright 2011b.

11. The "sanction of the victim" is a major theme of *Atlas Shrugged*. See especially *Atlas* part 2, chapter 4.

2. The Trader Principle versus Force

Returning to Rand's substantive ethical views, the positive counterpart to the non-initiation of force principle is what she calls the "trader principle." She writes: "The principle of *trade* is the only rational ethical principle for all human relationships, personal and social, private and public, spiritual and material. It is the principle of *justice*" (VOS 34). As this passage indicates, she uses the term "trade" in a somewhat broader than usual sense, so that the term encompasses both material exchange and personal relationships (such as love or friendship) that are mutually beneficial spiritually. The availability of a fully viable alternative social principle will be important in the justification of the non-initiation of force principle, since otherwise it might be held that force, whatever objections it may face, is a necessary means of human interaction.

Trade reflects a particular view of the ways in which interacting with other human beings can benefit someone's life. Fundamentally, trade made possible the development of knowledge and material values on a vastly expanded scale in contrast with what could be attained by one's own isolated action. To engage with others by trade is to participate in that process of development, and to derive one's sustenance from one's own participation. The premise of trade relationships, therefore, is that one benefits from social interaction by virtue of the opportunity it provides to sustain oneself in this way.

In trade, each person gains (in principle) from the success of others.¹² The productive abilities of one's trading partners expand one's own opportunities to specialize and to leverage the advantages of specialization to expand one's own production. In an environment of constantly expanding and diversifying productive activity, the market for one's own products expands (to the extent of one's ability to judge the market accurately). The wider and more variegated the range of other producers, the greater is one's own freedom to allow spiritual considerations—what

12. The force of "in principle" here is to exclude the sorts of missteps and setbacks that are endemic in human life simply because one's judgment is not infallible and accidents and emergencies can arise. These facts are part of the ineliminable background of human life in any configuration, but Rand makes two points about them that are relevant here: (1) metaphysically, accidents and emergencies are exceptional and can be minimized through human efforts; (2) missteps and setbacks arising from mistakes in judgment can generally be recovered from over time. These points are applicable, she holds, only in a free society, however, which protects its citizens from predation by others and otherwise leaves them able to function and provide for themselves.

one finds interesting and intellectually satisfying—to guide one's choice of specialization.

In a fully free society, Rand argues, one's participation in trade relationships makes it possible in principle to amply satisfy one's material needs and desires.¹³ The development and application of one's productive abilities in a chosen area of work provides the foundation for satisfying one's spiritual needs, especially the need for self-esteem and for a sense of meaning and purpose.¹⁴ Living as a trader thus provides a context not only for maintaining one's life but for the successful pursuit of happiness.

In trade relationships, according to Rand, there are no basic conflicts of interest among the participants. Each is free to take self-sustaining action. Moreover, since the production of material values is, in principle, unlimited, one may face competitive disadvantages in particular areas, but the success of others presents no fundamental obstacle to one's own. Since trade relationships are premised on the need to deal with others “by mutual consent to mutual advantage” (as judged by each of the parties), these relationships allow each participant to act as and be treated as an end in himself (VOS 34–35).

On Rand's view, trade relationships flow from and express the virtue of rationality. One of the central themes of *Atlas Shrugged* is that productive activity is rational activity. The producer must envision a product or service, evaluate it as good and beneficial, learn or devise the means of bringing it into reality (including the theoretical knowledge on which its production depends), communicate its existence to potential buyers, and organize its distribution. Each step involves an exercise of reason on some level.¹⁵ It expresses and depends on one's capacity for abstract thought, evaluative judgment, creative imagination, long-range planning,

13. Those who, because of chance factors, are unable to do this through their own efforts must rely on support from others, but this will be true in any form of social interaction. The primary question, therefore, according to Rand, is how those of normal ability in (metaphysically) normal circumstances should maintain their lives.

14. On these issues, see *Atlas* 90, 220, 240–41, 988, 996–97. Rand argues that both art and personal relationships are necessary for satisfying other crucial spiritual needs, and that trade relationships create a social context in which the production of works of art can be sustained. Although our concern here is primarily with economic trade, Rand holds that proper, nonexploitative personal relationships are based on a spiritual analogue of trade, in which each party gains spiritual benefits from the relationship. For discussion, see “The Objectivist Ethics,” VOS 34–35, and “The Ethics of Emergencies,” VOS 49–56; *Atlas* 1033; Wright 2016.

15. In a highly specialized economy, most people do not perform all or even most of these tasks, and they do not perform them single-handedly but within an organization that employs many people. Nevertheless, Rand argues, each person's work counts as productive

and other, related rational capacities.¹⁶ By facilitating specialization and division of labor, trade expands the life-enhancing process of applying reason in the world.

Further, in trade relationships, one does not expect others' automatic agreement or cooperation. In that sense, trade reflects a recognition that knowledge and value judgments are not automatic but depend on a self-initiated process of thought. A trader accepts the responsibility of making a case to those from whom she seeks agreement or cooperation—of appealing to their minds and submitting her own judgment to their rational scrutiny. This attitude constitutes the social expression of a commitment to objectivity. It reflects the view that since the acquisition of knowledge depends on the individual application of specific cognitive methods, an agreement between two people on any claim must proceed from the independent (but potentially collaborative) thinking of each party. Discussion and persuasion are the means by which trade relationships are established and maintained.

These kinds of considerations lead Rand to the conclusion that the trader principle respects and supports the long-range requirements of man's survival. Because of its connection to rationality, the trader principle is a moral principle, in her view; in upholding the principle one maintains the right basic relation of one's mind to reality. By contrast, Rand holds that the initiator of force perverts both the relation between her own mind and reality and the relation between her victim's mind and reality. We can see this from the main passage in which she discusses the non-initiation of force principle. The passage comes from Galt's radio speech in *Atlas Shrugged*, and I will reproduce it here in full:

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

To interpose the threat of physical destruction between a man and his perception of reality, is to negate and paralyze his means of survival;

since she must contribute something that is of value to her employer, and each person's activity demands that she use her mind in some way and to some extent. See *Atlas* 1020; "The Objectivist Ethics," *VOS* 25–29; *Atlas* 327–28; also Salmieri 2009.

16. Rand also regards artistic creation as a rational process. See *RM* chs. 1–3 and *AOF* ch. 1. Also see below, "Force and the Mind," section 1.

to force him to act against his own judgment, is like forcing him to act against his own sight. Whoever, to whatever purpose or extent, initiates the use of force, is a killer acting on the premise of death in a manner wider than murder: the premise of destroying man's capacity to live.

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

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

Be it a highwayman who confronts a traveler with the ultimatum: 'Your money or your life,' or a politician who confronts a country with the ultimatum: 'Your children's education or your life,' the meaning of that ultimatum is: 'Your mind or your life'—and neither is possible to man without the other. (*Atlas* 1023)

The fulcrum of argument in this passage is the compound claim that to make a demand backed by a threat of force "is to negate and paralyze [the recipient's] means of survival"—that is, her mind, her reason. I discuss each part of this claim in detail in the next chapter. But it is clear from the passage's structure that the argument rests significantly on this claim about how force works, which I will refer to as Rand's analysis of force. In the next paragraph, she argues in effect that there is a fallacy of self-exclusion involved in claims that anyone is rationally justified in initiating force. I discuss this argument below, also.

The polemical third paragraph is not unimportant, but the main part of the argument for the non-initiation of force principle comes in the

fourth paragraph. This material clearly depends on the analysis of force broached in the second paragraph; it will fall flat without this analysis to support it. So our subsequent examination of the “negation” and “paralysis” claims will be important. But to have significance those claims by themselves must be utilized in a further argument, and this is what the material in the fourth paragraph does.

Rand says that, because force hampers its victims’ “capacity to live,” it puts them in conflict with the unalterable requirements of their survival. To this extent, its results are destructive. But she also claims that the initiation of force constitutes, for the initiator, an “attempt to live in defiance of reality.” That is, she claims that the initiator defies reality by forcing others to live in conflict with what reality requires of them, if they are to survive. In what way is the initiator defying reality here? Since Rand says that “death by a process of gradual destruction is *all* that you and your system will achieve” (italics added), it is clear that she does not think the initiator can ultimately achieve any values by means of force, either for herself or for others. To obtain values from someone by coercion, the values have to exist. But the source of material values and all other human values, Rand claims, is a person’s freedom to form and act on her rational judgment. A policy of force, therefore, is systematically self-undermining. It progressively weakens the very engines of value-creation on which it relies to achieve its stated goals.

This is a more capacious argument than the narrowly tailored argument against a particular sort of free rider briefly sketched above, which focused on the self-destructive nature of specific and relatively superficial motives for using force. The argument here considers what Rand regards as the essential nature of any initiation of force, in any form and on any scale, whether by private individuals or by governments. Further, the central issue, from Rand’s perspective, is not just that force presents a free rider problem and thus cannot function as a principle of human interaction (along the lines of “it is always permissible to resort to force to achieve one’s goals”). This idea is present in the passage, and it is true that this principle could not be the basis of a society but would have to be practiced only at the margins, or else no one would be producing the goods or earning the wealth that free riders want to get their hands on. But the passage mainly deals with a different and more fundamental issue.

It is widely recognized that if coercion goes too far (if, say, the government’s economic regulations become too onerous), then producers will withdraw, since their production will no longer be profitable or even

just because the regulatory compliance is exasperating. But the problem is usually presented as if it were exclusively a matter of motivation, and as if the solution to the problem were simply to ensure that regulation (or taxation or whatever) is well enough contained that the damage to economic incentives is tolerable. Similarly, it is recognized that government control of speech and the press can have a “chilling effect,” destroying the incentive to write and speak. From this, the conclusion is drawn that the regulation of expression must at least be kept within certain narrow bounds.

But Rand’s argument goes beyond these motivational points. What she claims is that force, including especially governmental force, has the effect of interfering with rational thought and “destroying man’s capacity to live.” Force, she holds, prevents its victims from doing what is *metaphysically necessary* for their survival. Further, as was noted above, since the initiator is precisely counting on the survival capacities of these victims, her act of force constitutes an “attempt to live in defiance of reality.” Now Rand holds that those who live by force grasp, at some level, that they are defying reality, and yet they remain defiant. Her explanation for this is that, at the deepest level, they do not actually want to live—their fundamental motive is to destroy (*Atlas* 1013, 1024–25, 1133–46). But insofar as they go on acting, their manner of existence constitutes defiance of reality.

The fourth paragraph of the passage thus presents force as a major form of irrationality, and thus as a violation of a cardinal moral requirement. It is the irrationality of force that constitutes the basis of its moral prohibition. (The basis for its legal prohibition will be that it is only through retaliatory force that one can protect oneself from its initiation; one cannot respond to it by persuasion or by walking away.)

What does Rand’s argument have to say about the victims of initiated force? If the moral objection to force is that it violates the virtue of rationality, then the damage done to the victims seems morally significant only insofar as the initiator of the force needs them intact in order to go on existing himself. There would seem then to be no sense in which the initiator had wronged *them*—only, perhaps, a sense in which he has wronged *himself*.

But Rand’s ethics does have a way of explaining the wrong done to these victims. As a whole, the passage presents the initiation of force as a violation of the principles that must be observed “so long as men desire to live together.” It is implicit in the argument of the passage that a social existence (living together) is desirable for human beings. The non-

initiation of force principle is presented as one of the principles on which the benefits of a social existence depend. The wrong done to others lies in the violation of those principles; that is, the harm done to the victim of (initiated) force wrongs her qua violating these principles. The complaint that can be made by the victims of force against the initiators arises from the standpoint of their shared human interest in a certain kind of social interaction, which the initiation of force undermines. If human nature were different and, somehow, the good of the initiators required the sacrifice of their victims, then perhaps the latter would have no basis to complain. But if what human good requires is production and trade, then such a basis exists, and in that sense the victims have been wronged.

It might be objected, however, that there is no reason to suppose the use of coercion cannot be kept within carefully chosen limits, so it can accomplish some good without becoming oppressive and destructive. Perhaps, in a totalitarian dictatorship, the kind of widespread destruction that Rand envisions is unavoidable in the long run (and those perpetrating it are irrational in the double sense just explained). But her argument is also directed, for example, against the regulatory welfare state, which for all its coerciveness has not crippled human innovation and survival. We might cite the examples of Greece, Spain, and other advanced welfare states to argue the contrary—the trend of their policies is precisely toward the progressive impoverishment and demoralization of everyone. There is, however, a deeper point to make here also. The point of using force against others is to avoid the necessity of engaging with their *reasons* for action—regardless of those reasons' basis in reality—and to avoid the necessity of subjecting one's own reasons to critical scrutiny, in a process of discussion and persuasion. In this sense, the use of force involves a flight from reality, a wish to escape the constraints of realistic necessity; as such, it pushes against attempts to limit it. Further, the claim that force can be used to accomplish good ends, and can be limited by that objective, depends on a certain view of the good, which Rand will reject. I will return to this issue later in the essay.

The same response applies if we focus the objection on an individual who attempts to exist by force rather than on a social system. Rand says elsewhere that such “looters” drain and destroy their victims and then, as a result, destroy themselves because there is nobody left to loot (see *VOS* 25–26). Eric Mack has objected, however, that this assumes these looters must engage in wanton force, without consideration of consequences. If, instead, we suppose that they use force selectively and judiciously, so as

not to destroy the productive capacities and motivations of their victims, then their method of survival looks much more viable (see Mack 2013, 113–14). But for the reasons given above, I think that Mack fails to appreciate force's internal logic. To be careful and judicious requires, first of all, respecting reality and the means by which we gain knowledge of reality; in the practical realm, according to Rand, it means defining reality-based principles of action, based on the need we have for such principles—namely, the necessity of acting by principle if we are to maintain and enjoy our lives. The looters' intolerance of discussion, persuasion, and trade reflects a deeper intolerance of this sort of rational cognition.

3. The Epistemic Background of the Non-Initiation of Force Principle

Rand's analysis of force claims that the initiation of force negates and paralyzes the human mind. What this means, more specifically, is that it negates and paralyzes the mind's *cognitive* activities—its activities of thinking and acquiring knowledge (which I will often refer to as cognition, following Rand's usage). In addition, Rand makes further claims (which I outlined in the preceding section) about the relation of force and reason and the relation of force and the good. She advances this set of claims on the basis of certain views about the nature of cognition and knowledge and their role in human life. In this section, I will sketch those views, for the purpose of making her claims about force clear. My aim here is not to ascertain which specific premises are required to support which claims about force but, simply, to give an overview of the picture of thinking and knowing that informs Rand's various statements about the nature and effects of force.¹⁷ Various elements of this picture will assume importance as we proceed.

Rand's epistemological views reflect two *realist* theses, one metaphysical and one epistemological: (1) that reality exists, and is what it is, independently of any conscious being's awareness or beliefs; (2) that this independent reality can be known and that human beings do in fact have substantial knowledge of it. In regard to the structure of knowledge, she is a foundationalist. The foundation of knowledge, for her, lies in perception, on which, in various ways, all conceptual knowledge is based.

Rand takes perceptual states to be *preconceptual cognitive states*. The

17. There has been some excellent recent scholarship on Rand's epistemology, to which those seeking a more in-depth discussion can refer. See, in particular, the essays by Gotthelf, Salmieri, Ghate, and Lennox in Gotthelf and Lennox 2013, part 1; Binswanger 2014; Salmieri 2016e.

conjunction of these two attributes has been thought to raise problems, because it has been assumed that preconceptual states cannot afford material for inference and therefore cannot be cognitive. This has often been seen as an insurmountable problem for foundationalist epistemologies that treat perception as the foundation of knowledge. But she argues that perception, viewed along direct realist lines, provides material for a norm-guided process of concept-formation and application, which in turn provides material for inference—particularly, inductive inference. Conceptual classifications provide the first step toward inductive generalizations about the characteristics and behavior of particular kinds of existents (and these in turn are the basis for deductive reasoning about the world).¹⁸

Perception provides only a highly circumscribed awareness of reality, limited to one's immediate surroundings. If we were equipped with a rich instinctual infrastructure, such that cues from the perceptual field could trigger reliable motives for self-sustaining action, then perception would be cognitively sufficient for us, as it is for animals. But since we are not so equipped, perception alone is insufficient for our needs. Concepts and conceptual knowledge, Rand holds, offer a solution to this problem. What conceptual knowledge does is expand the range of material that a human consciousness can deal with by integrating it into a manageable number of units. Integration of prior cognitive material is a feature both

18. In perception, Rand maintains, we are aware of *material objects and their properties*. But although she is a direct realist about perception, she rejects naïve realism. The nature of our perceptual apparatus affects perception, but what it affects is the *form* in which perceptible objects' features appear to us, not the objects of perception. Thus, in her view, perception does not trap us behind a veil of ideas that screens off real, independent objects from view.

It is from within this framework that Rand addresses questions about the proper account of perceptual relativity. Strictly speaking, she holds, it is not accurate to say (for instance) that from certain angles pennies appear elliptically shaped. Rather, we should distinguish between *perceptual awareness* and *perceptual judgment*. Perceptual awareness always has a form determined by the nature of our perceptual apparatus; we detect certain features of the world in the form of colors, for example. When one looks at a penny from an angle, the form in which one sees its shape is sensitive to the penny's spatial relation to one's eyes. But the object of (direct) perceptual awareness remains the penny itself, not some intermediary item (e.g., an "idea") generated by the interaction of the penny with one's sense organs.

We can make inferences from perceptual material and thus regard it as cognitive in a standard sense of that term, because there are norms by which to justify our classification of the object as a "penny" (and for other classifications and judgments, such as that it is made of metal, copper colored, US legal tender, etc.). Those judgments can in turn figure into inference in various ways. But perception itself—the perceptual field—does not speak to us, as it were. It does not present itself to be a certain way or purport to represent reality in a certain

of concept-formation and of ordinary and scientific induction, for Rand. A concept classifies together a potentially unlimited class of the referents to which it applies, and an inductive generalization similarly purports to identify the attributes of or relations among an unlimited set of particular instances. For instance, a statement such as “The human body absorbs vitamin D from sunlight” condenses a wide body of (ultimately perceptual) evidence and applies to an unlimited number of cases past, present, and future.

Concepts enable one to grasp all of the members of an open-ended class of referents.¹⁹ Similarly, conceptual knowledge makes it possible to identify characteristics belonging to all of the members of a given class. In this sense, it extends one’s awareness beyond the frontiers of perception. When one is aware that “All S is P,” one is aware of a fact about all Ss, even though one could never be perceptually aware of all of them.²⁰ It is important, in this connection, to recognize that Rand understands knowledge in terms of *awareness*, not in terms of the more familiar framework of representation and belief. Knowledge, for her, is not a species of belief, to be distinguished by special marks such as truth and justification, though it can be perfectly accurate to describe someone who knows that such-and-such as having certain beliefs that are true and justified. The root conception of knowing for Rand is simply awareness—consciousness of an object—and the primary case of knowing is to be found in perceptual awareness. Propositional knowledge, knowing that something is the case, is a complex and derivative form of awareness, but it is not some-

way. It is not the penny that appears elliptical but the subject who (implicitly or explicitly) judges it to be so, based on a misinterpretation of the perceptual evidence.

As an objection to this analysis, it might be contended that we continue to see the penny as elliptical (or the straight stick submerged in water as bent, or the faraway tower as tiny) even after we have corrected our judgment about it. This might seem to suggest that it is perception itself that presents the penny to be elliptical (and thus misleads). But it seems to me that, if one carefully attends to one’s visual field, this contention turns out to be false. If the penny continued to appear elliptical, it would appear misshapen, somewhat like the liquefying objects in a Dali painting. But that is not how it seems. (By this, I do not mean that it seems some other way, but that it does not seem like this.) It requires a special effort of selective focus to recover what about the content of the perceptual field might have led one to believe that the penny was elliptical.

19. For Rand’s use of the concept of open-endedness in relation to concept-formation, see *ITOE* 17–18, 65–69.

20. When one knows fundamental truths concerning the properties or behavior of Ss, one is aware of new aspects of reality that had eluded one’s grasp on less sophisticated levels of knowledge.

thing categorically different from what goes on when, for instance, you see the furniture and other items in the room you're in, or you hear the passing traffic on the street.²¹

Concepts enable one to develop abstract knowledge and values, which one can use to set goals and guide one's action. This is their great advantage over mere perception; the challenge they present is that, unlike perception, concepts are not an automatic means of awareness since, beyond the simplest cases, they must be formed and maintained by a volitional (though not always explicitly self-conscious) process. The idea, for instance, that "animals" deserve to be grouped together as a class—or that there is such a thing as a "vitamin," and that this category is importantly distinct from other categories in our thinking about metabolism and nutrition—requires a process of purposeful effort to reach and understand.

It is not a given, however, that our conceptual classifications will always be cognitively productive. Since concept-formation has a necessary function in human cognition and thereby in human life (a function we cannot do without), we can derive norms for its proper operation. The norms are relative to the purpose of expanding the scope of one's awareness and understanding, and thereby of expanding one's ability to act successfully over the normal span of a human life. More specifically, since Rand holds that the purpose of concepts is to enable us to refer to and generalize about more than could be contained in a single frame of perceptual awareness, it is by reference to that goal that she would formulate the norms by which concept-formation should be governed.

Similar points can be made about the development of conceptual knowledge. Induction and deduction require a methodology—a logic—to guide them, and the norms for these fields are ultimately to be derived from the goals of conceptual cognition. The core of Rand's claim that force negates and paralyzes thought will be that it *interferes with the implementation of these necessary cognitive methods*.

Concept-formation and conceptual cognition, then, both require a methodology in order to ensure that concepts, judgments, and theories actually do serve to expand and refine one's grasp of reality. Described in general terms, this methodology involves respecting what Rand calls *hierarchy* and *context*. Hierarchy requires ensuring that new cognitive material has the right sort of justificatory ties to the foundations of hu-

21. Rand thus defines knowledge not as justified true belief but as a "mental grasp of a fact(s) of reality" (see *ITOE* 35).

man knowledge in perception; context requires integrating that new material consistently with other knowledge. These, for Rand, are the primary methods by which thought can be steered toward truth.²²

The idea that the conceptual must be grounded in the perceptual does not mean that every concept refers to something perceptible or that every proposition describes perceptible states of the world. But it means that concepts of perceptible entities are the starting point for all subsequent conceptualization and that the justification for forming even highly abstract concepts will always ultimately trace back to our cognitive needs in navigating through the perceptible world.²³ Further, it means that an elementary level of perceptually based generalizations are the foundation of all inductive knowledge. Rand regards human knowledge as having a hierarchical structure, in that any given item of knowledge (e.g., a given scientific principle) might be more or less far removed from these elementary inductions, requiring a longer or shorter series of prior cognitive steps in order to reach or validate. Paying attention to issues of hierarchy involves ensuring that this epistemic support structure is properly in place. Hierarchical relationships as Rand views them can be quite complex; they certainly do not reduce to a multiplicity of isolated chains of inference, the links of which consist of individual claims or small sets of claims. Two broad patterns are worth differentiating: (1) the move from narrower principles to wider ones and (2) the move from a more generalized context to a narrower, more specialized field of study that depends in some way on having the more general view in place. In each pattern, the subsequent material is in Rand's sense further up the hierarchy of knowledge, further removed from elementary perceptual observation and generalization.

The issue of context is closely related and, although it has various aspects, pertains fundamentally to the way in which evidence is assimilated

22. On these two requirements, see Peikoff 1991, 121–41, also ch. 4.

23. This criterion certainly does not mean that every important discovery will have ready practical application or even any such application, in the long run. The pursuit of knowledge is in principle necessary and beneficial for human life, and that is virtually all that the scientific enterprise and the study of the humanities requires in the way of justification, from Rand's perspective, though by the same token there is no basis for the kind of view that demeans the applied sciences as lesser pursuits, either. (See, in this latter connection, her characterization in *Atlas Shrugged* of the scientist Robert Stadler, who holds a view of applied science that Rand rejects and that she ultimately considers incompatible with the possibility of free scientific inquiry, because it implies that the state must fund and control basic science.) For an excellent discussion that compares Rand's view and the ancient Greeks' view of the value of knowledge (and the relevance of Stadler to this issue), see Salmieri 2009, 229–322.

in the development of inductive knowledge.²⁴ Rand holds that, beyond the most elementary inductive generalizations from perception, the epistemic justification of every piece of general knowledge involves both (1) appropriate evidence and (2) a prior context of general knowledge that guides the assimilation of the evidence. The prior context of knowledge provides the framework in which new questions can be raised and new evidence evaluated.²⁵

Suppose, for example, that we want to know how the ingestion of a certain substance affects the blood glucose levels of laboratory mice. We give it to the mice, say, by dissolving it in their water and, after a certain time interval, measure their levels of blood glucose. Let us say we find a large spike, compared to some baseline measurements taken before the substance was administered. Both the design of the experiment and the conclusion that the substance raised the mice's blood glucose levels obviously depend on a large body of established science. This context includes too much to list here, but we can mention the following as examples: (1) the general knowledge that food and other ingested substances can affect the blood glucose levels of and the knowledge of the time frame in which such effects can be observed (e.g., twenty minutes, two hours, three weeks, etc.); (2) the knowledge of the chemical properties of glucose and its role in mammalian biology; (3) the scientific and technological knowledge on which the procedure and equipment for measuring the mice's blood glucose levels is predicated; (4) the knowledge of how the mice's blood glucose levels should normally behave in the absence of the special substance.²⁶

24. I say that this is the fundamental issue here because, for Rand, inductive knowledge is a prerequisite for the deductive application of knowledge to particular cases. Issues of context arise here, also, but for the sake of brevity I will focus on the inductive case, since this will be sufficient to explicate the aspects of Rand's defense of the non-initiation of force principle that depends on her epistemology.

25. In her view, even elementary perceptual inductions depend on a certain kind of context: they depend on implicit metaphysical premises, such as the premise that there are real and stable causal relationships, or that thoughts cannot directly control the behavior of inanimate objects, or that effects observed in the natural world have natural causes. At a relatively advanced stage of knowledge, these kinds of premises can be made precise and explicit and can be given a systematic justification, which for Rand consists in showing that the facts they identify are inherent in the very fact of (anything's) existence. I leave aside here the details of that project of justifying the most basic philosophical principles, which for Rand provide the indispensable framework for all inquiry.

26. These are among the kinds of considerations that are sometimes used to support the claim that observation is "theory-laden." Rand doesn't draw this conclusion. Since percep-

Paying attention to issues of context, for Rand, means bringing the entire relevant context of prior knowledge to bear in the assessment of evidence on any question, whether in science or ordinary life. What is the *relevant* context—what does it contain? Rand's answer is that it potentially contains everything one already knows; that is, one cannot refuse in advance to consider the possible bearing of any item of knowledge on one's assessment of the evidence on a given issue. At every stage, the warrant for each new conclusion is that it makes best sense given the evidence available to one and *everything* one already knows. The working out of detailed criteria for evaluating evidence in this contextualized way is a matter for epistemology and the philosophy of science, and the details can be passed over here. What is important, for purposes of this discussion, is the general principle that one must bring to bear the whole of one's prior context of knowledge. Since knowledge has an overall organizational structure, it is not a question of riffling through everything one knows; for instance, one would normally have no grounds to expect that anything pertaining to the fall of the Roman Empire would bear on data analysis in mouse studies.²⁷

According to Rand, the process of acquiring conceptual knowledge, in order to take place at all, must be volitionally initiated, sustained, and directed by each thinker. Nothing can cause it to happen, she argues, except one's own choice, to the best of one's ability (a point that will be important in her discussion of force). Beyond the most elementary levels, conducting the process correctly requires some degree of self-consciousness, though in nonspecialized contexts this need not amount to formulable methodological knowledge but only to some ability to ex-

tion, in her view, provides preconceptual cognitive access to the world, in the manner indicated previously in the text, perceptual awareness is prior to all theory. Further, elementary perceptual generalizations depend only on having the relevant concepts and on implicit philosophical principles, where the latter are directly self-evident and depend on no other general knowledge (even though the concepts required for expressing them are highly abstract and advanced and thus could not be grasped early in one's cognitive development). All subsequent knowledge, including the knowledge of how our scientific instruments work, builds on that foundation, according to Rand. For discussion of the issues raised in the text and in this note, see Peikoff 1991, ch. 4; Peikoff 2005, lecture 1.

27. This issue has an additional, cultural aspect. Specialists in any field of inquiry properly focus on their own specialties. But the development of human knowledge also requires generalists who work across different fields and help to integrate diverse areas of knowledge. Further, Rand assigns to philosophy the important role of providing an integrating framework for all human knowledge and disseminating knowledge of appropriate standards for inquiry.

plain the grounds on which one drew a given conclusion. Over time, and all else being equal, the application of appropriate cognitive methods will lead toward increasing knowledge, but in any given case the fact that one's thinking has followed all the requisite norms does not preclude the possibility of error. Even in the face of error, however, there is a difference between the conclusions reached by a thought process that satisfies the relevant cognitive norms, on one hand, and a random guess (or a rationalization), on the other.

It is in terms of the methodological requirements of conceptual cognition that Rand understands the concept of *objectivity*. It has been common to think of objectivity as seeking a “view from nowhere,” in Nagel's memorable phrase (see Nagel 1986). This model of objectivity implies that we must somehow transcend the limitations of our own cognitive equipment, which is unavoidably located in time and space. Rand argues that such a view of objectivity treats the involvement of the subject's own constitution as a “disqualifying element” in cognition and implies that objective cognition occurs magically, by no means whatsoever (*ITOE* 80). By contrast, she understands objectivity roughly as the right use of one's cognitive capacities. More specifically, what a rational conception of objectivity requires, in her view, is *basing the self-direction of one's cognitive processes on the requirements of cognition*, thereby rendering those processes suitable for the systematic acquisition of knowledge. A cognitive process that meets this description will be an objective one, and by extension the products of such a process—concepts, judgments, theories, evaluations—can also be characterized as objective.

An objective judgment, for Rand, is implicitly conditional. It is held only in consideration of the relevant evidence, background context of knowledge, and methodology (as brought to bear by the knower). This conditional status is necessary for a judgment or a theory to constitute a grasp or an awareness of reality. Without some systematic, though perhaps inexplicit, connection between judgment and these conditioning elements, the judgment is essentially an arbitrary guess and cannot constitute a *grasp* of reality, even if it happens to be accurate.

A claim endorsed in disregard of the need for a specific and appropriate method of cognition is in Rand's terms “arbitrary.” It is a noncognitive assertion, whose acceptance undercuts the cognitive status of everything that relies on it. The issue here is not primarily whether one has exactly the right cognitive methods but, rather, whether the methods one uses re-

flect one's best (implicit or explicit) understanding of the requirements of cognition. If so, then one will have a potential basis for (eventually) correcting any methodological errors, and the conclusions that one reaches will not be arbitrary, even if some of them are false and therefore also require correction.²⁸ But the acceptance of a claim in isolation from context and evidence short-circuits this process, bringing cognition to a standstill. The manner in which force works to undercut the methodological integrity—the objectivity—of human cognition is by attempting to instill arbitrary claims.

This discussion has focused on Rand's views of knowledge and cognition. But some cases of cognitive paralysis will involve art and the process of creating an artwork. In Rand's view, although the function of a work of art is not to disseminate knowledge, artistic creation is a rational and, in some ways, a cognitive process. An artist creates from what Rand calls his "sense of life," which she characterizes as "a pre-conceptual equivalent of metaphysics, an emotional, subconsciously integrated appraisal of man and of existence" ("Philosophy and Sense of Life," *RM* 14). Explicit convictions are also relevant to the production of a creative work, in Rand's view. But artistic creativity relies crucially on the artist's subconsciously held view of life. It is this view that fuels and sets the terms for an artist's work and thus serves as the foundation of creative expression.

28. I take it that the issue of arbitrariness arises both in regard to the ideas one accepts and to the methodology one uses in reaching one's ideas. Like a claim reached by no particular method at all, a claim reached by an arbitrarily picked method (a method accepted with no sense of its basis) will itself be arbitrary, and one's acceptance of it will reflect a disregard for the need of an appropriate cognitive method. (Rand would, I think, hold that there are limits on the possible extent of nonarbitrary methodological errors. For instance, I doubt she would accept that the belief that knowledge of reality required no input from the senses could be the foundation of a nonarbitrary method.) It may seem as though there is a regress problem here. If the nonarbitrariness of a claim depends on the nonarbitrariness of the method (and not just on one's having some method or other), then does the nonarbitrariness of the method depend on one's having a further, nonarbitrary "meta-method" for reaching one's methodological principles, and so on, to infinity? I think Rand's answer would be that early methodological knowledge requires only a minimal and implicit methodology. Concept-formation at the early stages, she holds, is barely volitional, and implicit generalizations simply involve applying these concepts to what one perceives. (On volition and early concept-formation, see *ITOE* 150–51, also 144–45; "The Comprachicos," *ROTP* 54–55.) Rand did not discuss induction in any detail, but Leonard Peikoff has developed a view of induction that is based on her theory of concepts and is indicative of how she might approach the topic. On this, see Peikoff 2005, lecture 1. His account is further discussed in Harriman 2010, esp. ch. 1. See also Salmieri 2013, 66–69.

4. Initiated Force: A Brief Taxonomy

What Rand calls the *initiation of force* can take various different forms. Most of the ways of initiating force can also be ways of using force in retaliation. But I will set aside retaliatory uses of force for the time being; unless otherwise specified it should be understood that “force,” “threat,” “coercion,” and related terms all refer to their initiatory forms. The ways of initiating force are not all on the same level theoretically; some are primary and others are included by analogy with or extension from the primary ones.

The uses of physical force that Rand is paradigmatically concerned with occur without the recipient’s consent and, in most cases, against her will. Hugs, handshakes, ordinary surgical procedures, consensual sex acts, and other consensual forms of physical contact can be left to one side. The simplest cases of force are (1) direct attacks on the person (e.g., killing or doing bodily injury) and (2) physical confinement. Following Rand, we will call these cases of *direct force*.

These forms of force attack the process by which the victim maintains her life, and Rand’s ethics prohibits them on that basis. Unlike other forms of wrongdoing, direct force (to the extent of its efficacy) materially interferes with the victim’s ability to engage in a course of self-sustaining action. By contrast, if your spouse cheats on you or a business partner becomes irrationally hostile and defensive, you might be harmed in various ways but your ability to meet the requirements of your survival remains unhampered, as long as you can withdraw from the relationship by an act of will and thereby insulate yourself from the relationship’s damaging effects.²⁹

Rand is particularly concerned with threats of (direct) force, which she calls a form of indirect force. Why does a threat to use force count as an actual usage? One answer would be that it is the availability of direct force that does the work in securing compliance. By contrast, in bargaining for something one wants, one offers the other party a value in exchange, and it is this value that does the work in securing compliance. So a threat of force, unlike the offer of a bargain, relies on the possibility of force to achieve its end, and in that sense can be said to make use of, or be

29. This will not be the case in a legal system with extremely strict constraints on dissolving a marriage or business partnership. But I think Rand would use this as an argument against such restrictive laws. Here, though, the point is simply that the other party, whatever wrong she has done, creates no physical obstacle to withdrawal.

a use of, force. Since the use is not actual or occurrent, it can be described as indirect; thus, when a threat is considered “indirect force,” we should understand the qualifier to be modifying “use” rather than “force.”

These points seem to me to provide reasonable initial grounds for regarding threats of direct force as uses of force—that is, for seeing both threats and direct force as instances of one basic way of treating others that can be contrasted with the use of persuasion and trade. This classification does not in itself warrant an across-the-board moral condemnation of everything in the “force” category; that assessment depends on the substance of the argument for the non-initiation of force principle sketched in the preceding section (and the vindication of that argument through an unpacking of the claims about negation and paralysis of judgment and the full elaboration of its other steps). But this classification provides grounds for seeing both threats of force and direct force as variants of a single means of interaction. As Rand develops the concept of initiated force to encompass more complex indirect cases, she will also refine this account of the underlying similarities uniting all cases of initiated force, making it possible to identify more fundamental characteristics that confirm and support these initial grounds for the classification.

Threats of direct force can be divided into two subcategories: those demanding action (“Your money or your life”) and those demanding belief (such as the forcible imposition of a religious orthodoxy). Rand’s treatment of these two cases differs; in the first she argues that the threat “negates” the victim’s thinking, and in the second she argues that the threat “paralyzes” the victim’s thinking (to the extent that she complies with it). Notice that in both cases Rand is arguing that the threat has some effect that reaches to the victim’s thinking, even though in the first case what the threat explicitly demands is only action (see, in this connection, Peikoff 1991, 313).³⁰ I discuss these two effects of force on the mind in the next chapter.

A fourth broad category of cases that Rand will recognize as initiations of force involve actions taken (or threatened) against private property. These include theft, breaking and entering, and trespass, and threats that rely on the possibility of these outcomes. They also include breach of

30. As will become clear below, Rand also holds that other indirect forms of force—such as threats against property or against people one values—can negate or paralyze thinking, but again the effect that ensues will depend on whether the threat demands action or belief. Further, Rand will argue that types of force that do not consist in a threat, such as confinement or seizure of property, also have the effect of negating the victim’s thinking.

contract, fraud, and extortion to obtain someone's money or other property (see "The Nature of Government," *VOS* 130/*CUI* 383).³¹ The inclusion of this category of cases raises a question about the order of justification in Rand's political philosophy: does the non-initiation of force principle logically precede or follow Rand's account of individual rights? (I discuss this question in "The Scope and Justification of Rand's Non-Initiation of Force Principle," below). In short, my view is that, in Rand's thought, the more basic cases of initiated force are identified and evaluated independently of and prior to the theory of rights.³² The goal of the theory of rights is, then, to delineate principles for the formation of a society that meets the needs of man's life. The prohibitions contained in the initial specification of the non-initiation of force principle are reflected in the theory of rights, but the theory of rights also supports an expanded conception of the range of actions that violate the non-initiation of force principle.³³

31. I take it that "extortion," in the broadest sense, encompasses any threat of force, although in its primary usage it refers to threats used to obtain a financial payment. Whether fraud and breaches of contract should be seen as forms of force is controversial; I will discuss this controversy, and relate it to Rand's views, later.

32. In my view, the specification of the non-initiation of force principle by reference to which the theory of rights is developed includes an additional class of comparatively elementary cases not yet introduced: the seizure of nonproprietary goods appropriated for use directly from nature and under one's active control. If, prior to the institution of a society with private property rights, you have gathered some apples beside you to eat, it would be an initiation of force and thus a violation of the non-initiation of force principle for someone else to seize them from you. This claim is not obvious; so in "The Scope and Justification of Rand's Non-Initiation of Force Principle" (below), I discuss the justification for it that comes out of Rand's philosophy. But what property rights will do, in Rand's account of them, is extend and objectively delineate the possible scope of a person's morally legitimate control over physical resources and other material values (including finished goods produced from natural resources and, eventually, intellectual property).

33. As I will argue later, Rand is not forced to choose between a "moralized" and a "non-moralized" account of force (contrary Matt Zwolinski's claim in his contribution to this volume, 84). We might say that her view is partially moralized, but this might be misleading, because it might suggest that she defines some cases of force in terms of rights, whereas what actually supports the classification of (say) property crimes as force, in her view, is not per se that they are violations of rights but, rather, the kind of effect that (such) rights violations have on the victim's life. Specifically, property crimes undermine a necessary aspect of human self-preservation that property rights make possible. The relevance of rights to the delineation of complex cases of force is that these *specific* negative effects would not be present in the absence of rights, since the underlying positive, life-sustaining action would not be present. This is not to say that in the absence of property rights there would not be other, equally deleterious harms to life to contend with; there surely would be.