

# **IS SELF-INTEREST ENOUGH?**

**By**

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## INTRODUCTION

"The human spirit. The heroic in man. The aspiration and the fulfillment, both. Uplifted in its quest -- and uplifting by its own essence. Seeking God -- and finding itself. Showing that there is no higher reach beyond its own form." Ayn Rand, The Fountainhead.

In The Fountainhead and Atlas Shrugged Ayn Rand laid the groundwork for a moral system which provided people a means to achieve their potential. Her Objectivist ethics stipulates that we should choose only those values that are in accordance with our rational self-interest, with Man's life as the standard of value.

Nonetheless, over the last twenty years I have noticed that many Objectivists, despite their avowed passion for reason and their commitment to their own happiness, seem at a loss about how to enjoy their lives.

It would seem logical to assume that Objectivists would enjoy an enormous advantage over others, because they have Rand's ethics to guide them. This should allow them to achieve much more and be much happier than non-Objectivists. Such is not always the case. To illustrate this, let us consider the essay "The Psychology of Pleasure" in The Virtue of Selfishness by then-Objectivist Nathaniel Branden in which he discusses the "five (inter-connected) areas that allow man to experience the enjoyment of life: productive work, human relationships, recreation, art, sex."<sup>1</sup>

Many Objectivists I've met express anguish, uncertainty and frustration about their careers. Unlike Rand's fictional characters, few Objectivists display a level of effort or output that one would call "heroic."

The Objectivist ethics encourages fulfillment through friendships and relationships. Yet, loneliness all too often is the Objectivist's hallmark. I've never encountered a group of people who have relationships as volatile, quarrels as bitter, or friendships as fragile and vulnerable to sudden, violent breaks as do Objectivists. While the average person is typically married, has children and a supportive network of family and friends, the typical Objectivist is single, or if married, has no children.

Recreation is supposed to be a third source of enjoyment, though many of the Objectivists I've met would rather discuss Objectivism than play sports or pursue a hobby or craft.

Objectivist morality extols the importance of Romantic art. Unfortunately, too many Objectivists seem to repress their own preferences for the fear of being labeled "irrational" and stick to the safety of officially sanctioned art. This has created a dismaying uniformity of artistic tastes among Objectivists.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, the Objectivist ethics celebrates romantic fulfillment. But too many Objectivists I have met are lonely. They have a difficult time getting married, staying married or having children. For a philosophy that champions the bold, innovative, fearless hero and heroine, there is an astonishing number of timid young bachelors and desperate, aging spinsters. Of all the phenomena I've witnessed, this has to be the saddest.

In general, Objectivist morality is supposed to be the means for men and women to excel, to achieve, to take action and to passionately pursue and enjoy values. Yet an extraordinary percentage of Objectivists seems rooted to quiet, sheltered college campuses, safely isolated from the complexities and challenges of the real world. Instead of pursuing values, their commitment to the philosophy is expressed by their weekly presence at taped Objectivist lecture courses, by their yearly pilgrimage to Boston's Ford Hall Forum and by their eagerness to engage in abstract arguments.

I admit these are personal observations, but they have been noted by many others. My purpose is not to vilify Ayn Rand nor to ridicule some of her followers. I have spent twenty years trying to live by her ideas; some of the problems I have described apply to me as well. After two decades I am still faced with this question:

Why hasn't the Objectivist ethics made a more positive and lasting impact on the lives of its proponents?

I concluded that the Objectivist ethics does not provide enough specific guidance for translating abstract concepts such as "Man's life as the standard of value" and "rational self-interest" into our lives. This is not to say Rand was wrong. She just did not go far enough. She gave us the science of ethics, but not the art of living.

### **The Objectivist Ethics**

Any time we learn a new skill, whether it is tennis or writing, studying a book on techniques and the rules is only enough to give an idea of what to do. To learn and become proficient, we need to go out and play the game, take some swings, make mistakes, learn what to do right and, most of all, enjoy it. Expertise does not come from constantly analyzing the game or the rule book.<sup>3</sup>

Let's consider for the moment the advice Rand offers in The Virtue of Selfishness, her primary ethical work, for applying her concepts to real-life situations.

In her article, "The Ethics of Emergencies," Rand outlines the method for judging when one may help another person: "by reference to one's own rational self-interest and one's own hierarchy of values." In general, she says we should not sacrifice our interests to others. How does this help us in our daily lives, however? Does this forbid us from volunteering our time, money and effort to support charities? How do we decide if we should take in an ailing parent or grandparent? Can helping others be a value to us? The essay provides several examples of when it is appropriate and inappropriate to help others. But how do we establish the hierarchy of such values in the first place?

In "The 'Conflicts' of Men's Interests," Miss Rand writes: "To say that a man's interests are sacrificed whenever a desire of his is frustrated -- is to hold a subjectivist view of man's values and interests." But conflict is not the same as sacrifice. While it is true that your interests are not "sacrificed," say, when someone else equally or even less qualified than you gets the same job, is there no "conflict" between the two candidates? The person who gets the job may have been picked merely because of his connections with management. Furthermore, you may have to answer to your former competitor and may have no other avenue for advancement. You may be faced with changing jobs if you want to be a manager badly enough. My point is that while sacrificing interests is not inevitable, this does not help someone deal with nonsacrificial conflicts of interest.

A husband and wife disagree on what school their child should attend. The husband wants nothing to do with the public school system. Instead, he wants to send his child to a Montessori school. The wife claims they have paid the taxes that support the public school and, even though she agrees schools should be privately run, they cannot easily afford the extra expense of a private school.

This is a conflict in how to apply the same set of beliefs. Neither spouse expects the other to sacrifice his interests, yet they have a sticky conflict -- over the same interest.

Rand's analysis of the question "Doesn't Life Require Compromise?" concludes with "There can be no compromise on moral principles." Again, we are left with few examples that really show how to apply this principle.

You are the manager of international sales for a large company and its president puts you in charge of negotiating with the Soviets to buy your products. Do you (a) refuse and stand the chance of being fired, (b) quit, (c) perform your job after expressing your moral reservations or (d) do what you are told without voicing any objections? Arguments could be offered for at least three of the four decisions. Do any of these choices require moral compromise?

You are faced with voting in the Presidential election in which the Democrat is an ultra-liberal masquerading as a moderate (Dukakis) and the Republican is a mish-mash of some good principles and pragmatism. Do you vote? Are you compromising your laissez-faire principles by voting for the Republican?

Rand's advice for "How Does One Lead a Rational Life in an Irrational Society?" is: "One must never fail to pronounce moral judgment." Or, "judge, and be prepared to be judged." Rand advises us to morally evaluate "every person, issue and event with which one deals, and act accordingly," and to make that evaluation known when it is "rationally appropriate." But there is little indication of what is "rationally appropriate." Lacking this guidance, many Objectivists possess hair-trigger tendencies to condemn others.

None of this advice specifically answers the crucial question: how do you live your life, whether it is in a rational, semi-rational or irrational environment?<sup>4</sup> Other than the introductory essay in which Rand explains the basis for her ethics, there is little else on how to choose and create values. Most of her essays deal with how to defend yourself against irrationality. However, defending is a different endeavor from achieving.

Rand's major accomplishment in ethics was to introduce rational self-interest as the criterion for determining the "playing field". She did not get into what we do once we are on the field. The lack of detailed discussion by Rand (and her representatives) of how to apply abstract ethical principles to the complexities and ambiguities of life has left many of her admirers in a quandary. To stretch the playing field metaphor a bit, we have no coach on the sidelines and the only game plan we received in the locker room was: "Be rational and always pass moral judgment." And, as we trot onto the field, we can faintly hear: "Oh, by the way, have fun!"

### **IS RATIONAL SELF-INTEREST ENOUGH?**

"Every man creates his meaning and form and goal." Ayn Rand, The Fountainhead.

The term "rational self-interest" reveals its own inherent limitations. It tells us that Ayn Rand's ethics belongs to the category of moral theories in which the actor is the beneficiary of his own actions -- the distinctiveness of Rand's theory being its advocacy of reason as the guide to choices and actions. Thus, her ethics tells us who should be the beneficiary (you) and by what means we ensure the choices are not self-destructive (reason).

To most people this is just "common sense." No, most Americans aren't consistently selfish in Rand's sense of the word. Nor do they have a consciously worked out ethics. But in daily living, they are predominantly reasonable and strive to better their lives. (Hence, the "American dream.") They think, plan and work to achieve the things they

think will fulfill them and make them happy. So why -- they could ask -- do they need such abstract formulations?<sup>5</sup>

The standard of Man's life and the principle of rational self-interest are fine for carving out the territory of values appropriate to man, but they don't tell people very much. They do not really provide us with the detailed guidance we need to make many important decisions among competing "goods." The reason: they are generalizations for the human species. They do not help the individual choose from among the numerous values which are rational, but perhaps not particularly appropriate for himself.

The Objectivist ethics tells him only that he need to support himself -- not what career to pursue, how intensively, and in what balance to other aspects of his life, such as family, vacations, hobbies and recreation. It tells him to select a mate from among "rational women" -- but within the range of eligible women, it offers no clues as to what other factors should be decisive. It tells a woman to have her own career and to be a "man-worshipper" -- but leaves her in a quandary over what to do about her career when her husband's company transfers him out of state.

One could say that self-interest is not supposed to guide us in all the particulars of life, that such choices are entirely optional. We can pursue whatever interests us. What self-interest does is define the playing field. It rules out certain activities that are irrational. But is this enough?

Nowhere is the practical inadequacy of such abstract ethical formulations more apparent than in the five "pleasure areas" mentioned by Nathaniel Branden.

### Choosing a Career

Picking a vocation because it will benefit others without any benefits to you obviously is ruled out by the Objectivist ethics. You have to be the beneficiary. But there are almost limitless productive careers available, almost all of which do not threaten your life nor require serving others. You can be a professional basketball player, accountant or nuclear physicist. How does rational self-interest help you decide?

Normally we tend, quite naturally, to choose careers (and friends, recreations, art, or romantic partners) which fit our abilities, interests and temperaments. But this isn't wholly satisfactory. There is still a need for some principle(s) to help us make such choices, for they profoundly affect how happy we'll be. Without a unifying principle, we simply have no means for selecting wisely from among many life-enhancing, pleasurable activities. Without such a principle, we can end up with a smorgasbord of eclectic pursuits, all adding up to the frustrated life of the dilettante or a life restricted to a narrow band of interests that do not do justice to our capabilities.

Even trying to define careers (or actions) that are "irrational" can raise difficult questions. If "life" commands the top of our value hierarchy, then "life-threatening" jobs would seem irrational to pursue. What about such vital, yet hazardous jobs as police work, fire-fighting or espionage -- jobs in which risks may be high, but the work fulfilling, challenging and meaningful? How does one weigh personal risks versus personal rewards? Can an outside observer tell what is a calculated risk, and what is irrationally foolish, solely by reference to the principle of rational self-interest?

Then there is the question of the so-called "service" or "helping" professions, such as teaching, psychotherapy, law enforcement, nursing, social work, etc. Are they "rational" endeavors for Objectivists? "Rational self-interest" would probably say: Yes, if you're paid and it isn't sacrificial. But to engage in such a profession, let alone become good at it, you'd have to enjoy the work -- that is, take a sincere interest in others and like helping them solve their problems. What does "rational self-interest" say about such a motive? In some service professions (police, fire fighting) the "helper" may even have to risk his life for a total stranger. Is that "rational"? Is it rational to enjoy it?

## Relationships

In my experience, Objectivists use one primary criterion when choosing a friend: are they Objectivists? This means naturally that they have few friends in the regular world and among their work associates. Anyone who has not read Rand is likely to have a broad range of beliefs, some good, some not so good. The Objectivist often writes this person off as just another irrational denizen of the outside world.

Relationships can offer many chances for expressing and enjoying one's values and virtues. The problem arises when Objectivists narrow their choices by homing on one feature of personality, which naturally leads to shallow and unstable relationships.

Because we are complex creatures and because we interact on various levels of intimacy, it is possible to have varying degrees of closeness with people. Some, those who share the most with us, would be close friends. Others would be relatively close because they share some values or they have biological ties, such as parents, siblings or other relatives. Still others, such as work associates, can be good acquaintances because we work well together, as well as have the same interest in sports, hobbies, etc. We can enjoy various levels of intimacy and values with people, even those who disagree with us on, say, politics. It is not obvious how doing so can threaten our self-interest.

Biological relationships occupy a special place in our lives, being relationships we did not choose (except for having our own children). Yet they are the first relationships in our lives and usually the closest ones we have, partly because we spend so much of our formative years with our parents and siblings. Objectivists have trouble with these

relationships because they seem to have no "rational" basis. Hence, they can be the most strained relationships in an Objectivist's life.

Parenthood represents an even greater challenge to the concept of rational self-interest as the sole guiding principle in living. Choosing to have children obviously creates major changes in one's life. At times (usually often!), being a parent means placing the well-being of your child ahead of yours. When the baby cries for milk every two hours through the night for the first three months, you have to give up some sleep, possibly enough to effect your job performance. Children demand lots of time, which means you have less private time to yourself and with your spouse. Having twins or triplets can even add so much strain on the parents (particularly the mother) that it affects their emotional health. And, raising kids isn't cheap. Their need for special furniture, clothes (which they grow out of before the bill is received), diapers, food, medical check-ups, medicine, etc., can place a major strain on the family's finances, especially if one of the spouses chooses not to return to work. This last decision can be a difficult one if the spouse who stays at home (typically the wife) had a career.

If a productive career is of paramount importance according to Rand, how does the decision to abandon or curtail one's job square with having children? This question applies even for the one who keeps full involvement with his or her career. If you are working to become a top manager in your company, long hours away from home are a given. If you also value having a close relationship with your spouse and children, you can't have both without something suffering. How does self-interest help you out of this?

In light of the above, how is having children in your rational self-interest? How does it fit in with "'Man's survival qua man'" (i.e., "the terms, methods, conditions and goals required for the survival of a rational being through the whole of his lifespan")?<sup>6</sup> Throughout Rand's writings she refers to man's "survival," "maintaining" his life and "sustaining" his life. Yet child-rearing appears to fall beyond the reach of these concepts. Although children don't directly threaten one's life, they certainly don't seem to help one survive. Parents generally recognize that having children creates responsibilities and burdens one did not have before.

This is not meant to make parenthood sound like a dismal duty. The joys of parenthood include watching your child grow and enjoy the experience of new-found abilities, and knowing that you played a role in this by nurturing and encouraging this growth. This is immensely satisfying for the parents even though it does not directly benefit their lives in terms of "survival value." That is, we can live without kids. So it seems that the motivation to become a parent does not neatly fit into rational self-interest. Why choose parenthood, then?

## Charity

Occasionally our friends may need help. It would seem ironic to profess to like someone, yet refuse to help them when they need it. Although Rand makes it clear in "The Ethics of Emergencies" that we should not devote our entire resources helping a friend, there is considerable room for debate on how much assistance is appropriate up to that point. Can rational self-interest tell us how far to go?

Charitable work means we care for others who are neither our offspring nor our clients. We are doing it for strangers who may have no way of re-paying us and who have no previous emotional or physical ties to us. Such activities include helping the reading-impaired, working in a soup kitchen or raising funds for the United Way. Can such work be justified by rational self-interest?

\* \* \* \*

The self in each of these cases is not the only or even the primary beneficiary. Parenthood involves devoting your efforts to helping your own children. Service professions entail being paid for your services. Charity, however, means contributing time and effort with no financial compensation. Is it appropriate to get involved in such activities? None of the examples involves our performing a duty. So, rational self-interest would not prohibit our involvement as long as we did it with ourselves as the (or a) beneficiary. But, how do any of them ensure our survival as a rational being?

## Recreation

Recreations offer pleasures involving the integration of the mind and body. Is it possible that having no recreational interests is not in our self-interest? If so, among the myriad avenues we could pursue for recreation, which are and are not in our self-interest? How do you choose among all of them using this principle? Does it rule out white-water rafting, for instance, which can be somewhat dangerous, yet exhilarating? Or mountain climbing and hang-gliding, both of which can be quite dangerous? Is it tennis versus stamp collecting? Knitting as opposed to weight-lifting? Such choices need to be based on something else.

## Art

Rand said that the function of art is to concretize our most profound values. But is it appropriate to seek art that represents other aspects and needs of our selves? And, how do we select our art by rational self-interest? It would weed out a steady diet of heavy metal rock, sado-masochistic literature and nonsensical sculpture -- but what else can it do for us?

## Romantic relationships

Romantic love, of course, can be the most profoundly satisfying part of our lives. Yet, Objectivists often settle for another Objectivist, under the belief that because they share the same philosophy they will be happy together. Many of these relationships do not last. Or Objectivists often rule out potential relationships with non-Objectivists.

Let's assume that you have found two candidates for a relationship. One is an Objectivist who also has certain bothersome, irritating traits. Your emotional characters clash. Your moods and energy cycles are constantly out of synch. The other is not an Objectivist, although she is generally reasonable, likes the same art, has a similar sense of humor and likes the same sport as you. What would self-interest tell you to do? Picking the more compatible person does not appear to threaten your well-being nor entail some kind of compromise of moral principles. In fact, you could end up having a much more fulfilling and long-lasting relationship than with the Objectivist. This example is stacking the deck, to be sure, but the same question could be asked if the Objectivist did not have the unreasonable elements of personality.

## Summary

Rational self-interest sorts out the easy cases. Yet within the range of permissible options left, Rand's ethics does not further help us pick our values. Rational self-interest helps us ensure we preserve our cardinal values of reason, purpose and self-esteem and our ultimate value, life. But it appears that we need another principle to help us choose our specific values.

Ayn Rand wrote much on the nature of Man and reason, as generic concepts. But she didn't write much about the nature of the individual self -- the particular person who was to take these generalizations and try to use them to strive, achieve and enjoy. Each man does, indeed, have a "species nature" -- being one of a class of rational, volitional, independent animals. But each of us is also a specific, unique individual. Each of us is a special blend of ambition, energy level, interests, emotions, temperament, values and styles of thinking.<sup>7</sup> This uniqueness is our individual identity. To be happy, we must obtain the values consonant with our nature as a human, and as a particular human.

This implies that the Objectivist moral standard of "Man's Life" needs to be translated for each of us, to let us express and satisfy the uniqueness of our selves. "Rationality" needs a companion principle to prevent it from floating off into rationalistic escapism -- into mere abstraction for its own sake, with no achievement-oriented goals anchoring it to reality.<sup>8</sup>

## EUDAIMONISM AND SELF-ACTUALIZATION

"The ancient Greek philosophers did not urge self-sacrifice on men, but self-realization. Socrates, Aristotle, even Plato to some extent, taught that man is a value; that his purpose in life should be the achievement of his own well-being; and that this requires among other conditions the fullest extent of his intellect."  
Leonard Peikoff, The Ominous Parallels.

The ancient Greeks worked diligently to define such a principle. In Personal Destinies, David Norton describes their approach:

"In classical Roman belief, genii were the tutelary gods or attendant spirits allotted to all persons at birth, determining the character and governing the fortune of each individual. The Greek equivalent of genius is daimon, and 'eudaimonism' is the term for the ethical doctrine (which achieved its first systematic formulation in the words of Socrates and the writings of Plato and Aristotle) that each person is obliged to know and live in truth to his daimon, thereby progressively actualizing an excellence that is his innately and potentially."<sup>9</sup>

Aristotle is recognized as the source of the recent interest in "self-actualization," a term used by psychologist Abraham Maslow and expanded by philosopher David Norton. For Aristotle, to be an actualizer is to be one who "partakes not only of living but of living well."

Aristotle spends much of his Nichomachean Ethics defining happiness, a concept that, to the Greeks, was far richer than the modern meaning. For Aristotle, happiness meant self-actualization. Eudaimonia -- living in accordance with one's daimon, or innate potential excellence -- is that good "for the sake of which everything else is done." According to John Cooper in Reason and Human Good in Aristotle, "Aristotle identifies eudaimonia, or human flourishing, so that the end which a person pursues as ultimate will constitute his idea of what it is for a human being to flourish."<sup>10</sup>

This may look essentially the same as Rand's concept of happiness, as "that state of consciousness which proceeds from the achievement of one's values".<sup>11</sup> But there are some differences. For example, Aristotle also held that, metaphysically, everything has a potential and an actual nature. The Greek concept of daimon reflects this idea: we are born with a potential which we are responsible for discovering and actualizing. We shall have more to say later on whether we agree with this notion of innate potential.

Self-actualization means we have to account for who we are, what we have evolved into. It is the process of assessing our interests, strengths and weaknesses -- which we may have inherited and developed through childhood and adolescence -- and relating them to our purpose or "mission" in life.

"Flourishing" is another word used to describe self-actualization. It derives from the word flower, and means "to blossom." It also means to grow vigorously, to succeed, to thrive, to prosper and to be at the peak of development. Plants flourish when the right amounts of heat, sunlight and water are added in the right combination to the seed planted in the best soil. Likewise, we flourish when we follow our nature, when we receive support from our parents during childhood, when we choose like-minded friends, when we think correctly and act well, when we give our selves the right nutrients for the mind, body and soul.

Aristotle's definition of eudaimonia has four parts. It entails "the active exercise of the faculties of the soul" (i.e., reason, discrimination, etc.); "in conformity with excellence or virtue" (using your mind to the best of your ability); "if there are several virtues, in conformity with the best and most perfect of them"; "during a complete lifetime."<sup>12</sup>

Or, as someone has paraphrased it: eudaimonia is the exercise of vital powers along lines of excellence in a life affording them scope. The excellence the Greeks referred to relates closely to their concept of balance, or kalon. Philosopher-adventurer Jack Wheeler describes this as "performing a moral act with grace and balance..., doing the right thing, on the right occasion, toward the right people, for the right purpose, and in the right manner, the performance and witnessing of which is aesthetically satisfying. Thus the kalon can be translated as either the morally noble or the morally beautiful."<sup>13</sup> A life well-lived -- said the Greeks -- is at once in balance, inspiring and beautiful to behold.

These formulations give us some specific criteria which we can use to help us, as individuals, make key decisions among rational values.

- Does the contemplated value best utilize my unique "vital powers"?
- Does it bring out the best in me?
- Does it limit or hamper me, or will it help me grow in the direction I want?

Such questions can be asked about any prospective value -- a career, a friendship, a mate, a hobby, a purchase...or how to spend an afternoon.

Thus eudaimonism or self-actualization acknowledges individuality, as well as Man's generic nature as a rational animal. Properly defined, this concept can help us make specific choices regarding careers, parenting, recreation, relationships and other issues.

## MODERN SELF-ACTUALIZATION THEORIES

A number of modern writers have tried to develop theories of self-actualization with varying degrees of success and sophistication.

**Abraham Maslow**, who wrote extensively about self-actualization from the 1950's through the 1970's, extensively interviewed high-achieving people. To self-actualize, Maslow found that a person needs "to do well the thing that one wants to do."<sup>14</sup> Indeed, as Maslow explains:

"What a man can be, he must be. This need we may call self-actualization. ... It refers to the desire for self-fulfillment, namely, to the tendency for him to become actualized in what he is potentially. This tendency might be phrased as the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything one is capable of becoming."<sup>15</sup>

Self-actualization, to Maslow, means listening to our "own voices," taking responsibility for this self-discovery, being honest with ourselves and working to actualize. Insights by themselves do not create accomplishments. (The failing of many therapies.)<sup>16</sup> They are a necessary, not a sufficient, condition. Insights about our self have to be put into action.

Maslow's studies resulted in a lengthy list of traits common to self-actualizers. The salient ones are: benevolence, objective perception, self-acceptance, spontaneity, autonomy, peak experiences, creativity and effortless action. He also wrote extensively about the nature of peak experiences, an intensely pleasurable sense of merging with the task at hand. This experience can be so intense that the person loses the sense of ego and is completely absorbed by the emotion.

Whatever criticisms one may have of his description of "peak experiences," his focus is primarily on the healthy human being. He argues that psychology has dwelled for too long on the unhealthy, and that to cure the sick we first need to develop a model of what constitutes health. For him, self-actualizers represent the best within us and should be held up for our emulation.

**Gail Sheehy** used an approach similar to Maslow's in researching her book, Pathfinders. She interviewed people with considerable accomplishments in their respective fields and found a thread of common traits. "[T]he men who have attained the highest overall life satisfaction are broader. They have expanded well beyond the narrow career treadmill. ... By their fifties, they are involved in art, music, gardening, dancing lessons and gourmet cooking."<sup>17</sup>

"Pathfinders" balanced their individual growth with caring for others. In fact, they usually had a mission in life that extended beyond themselves. Their lives had long-term direction and meaning. They were cheerful and did not feel cheated by life, even if they had suffered setbacks and tragedies.

Some of the traits identified by Sheehy coincide with those picked by Maslow: honesty, responsibility, the need for a life mission and benevolence.

**Charles Garfield** studied top performers in the business world. "Peak performers," he says, "are not people with something added; rather, they are people with very little of their potential taken away. They develop an ability to achieve what they set out to, and to cultivate within themselves the characteristics they value most. More than any other factor, the difference between them and ordinary performers is that they consciously, persistently, intelligently refine and develop those characteristics."<sup>18</sup> They "make things happen toward goals, consistent with a mission, while developing oneself in the process."<sup>19</sup>

Typical of modern "self-help" advocates, **Louis Tice**, founder of The Pacific Institute, teaches people how to achieve their potential. Tice claims to have found these "thought patterns" in "high performance" people: trust, autonomy, initiative, industry, self-acceptance, intimacy, sharing, and integrity.<sup>20</sup>

All of these writers have grappled with elements of self-actualization, but the most serious modern philosophical work in this area has been done by **David Norton**. Norton's Personal Destinies provides a detailed modern defense, explanation and expansion of eudaimonism. In his view, self-actualization consists of finding one's "daimon," or ideal possibility, with the goal of becoming an excellent person who does "that which I, alone, can do." "Everyone is responsible for living the kind of life that will realize his or her distinctive kind of worth." Or, "each person is obliged to know and live in truth to his daimon, thereby progressively actualizing an excellence that is his innately and potentially."<sup>21</sup>

Because eudaimonia entails translating one's inner potential, it is not experienced only when we have reached our destination. When one is "on course," one also experiences eudaimonism. When we are not working to fulfill our daimon, we experience "disdaimonia" or disharmony.

There is much more to Norton's work than I can cover here. I recommend his book for its many valuable insights, as well as applications of the concept. (His discussion of the stages of life alone makes the book worth reading.)

## SELF-REALIZATION

"The Romantics did not present a hero as a statistical average, but as an abstraction of men's best and highest potentiality, applicable to and achievable by all men, in various degrees, according to their individual choices." Ayn Rand, The Romantic Manifesto.

Traditional eudaimonism recognizes the generic and individual nature of humans. It focuses properly on values and what constitutes living well, although it lacks explicit reference to Man's life as the standard of value. Our concept of self-actualization differs somewhat from Aristotle's and Norton's. Norton, for example, distinguishes the difference between self-actualization, which he advocates, and self-realization. He prefers the term self-actualization because self-realization "is a misnomer, and seriously misleading. To say that a possibility that assumes a working place in the existing world is thereby 'realized' is to imply that it was unreal before. But pure possibilities are in and of themselves fully real -- indeed, in respect of essence and identity they are supremely so. They are only nonexistent. And the belief that whatever is nonexistent is nothing is what George Santayana calls 'a stupid positivism, like that of saying that the past is nothing, or the future nothing, or everything nothing of which I happen to be ignorant.'"<sup>22</sup>

This concept draws from Aristotle's belief that the potential exists in reality. As Norton explains, "every person is both his empirical actuality and his ideal possibility, or daimon. Connecting the two is a path of implications, whose progressive explication constitutes what the Greeks termed the person's 'destiny'."<sup>23</sup> (Hence, the title of Norton's book.)

As much as I agree with the spirit and results of the Aristotelian/Nortonian approach, I take issue with their philosophical foundation. Rand held that a concept represents an epistemological essence, not one that exists metaphysically, as the Greeks believed. My concept of daimon parallels this approach. We create our own ideal based on our individual nature and act as if the projection was real. Self-realization, then, is an appropriate term to distinguish our concept from other eudaimonistic ones.

Projecting one's daimon is similar to how a novelist projects a hero -- only it is more personal. The novelist creates heroes as man might and ought to be. While having heroes is important for showing what is possible to humans, it is also important to fashion our own, personalized concept of who we want to be, given our individual nature, strengths and interests. We need to create our own "daimon" to serve as a beacon and an incentive to grow. We need to project an image of our selves as we might and ought to be.

Life is a work of art in the sense that, paraphrasing Rand's definition, one's life is the selective re-creation of reality in accordance with his most profound beliefs and values. Religion provides its followers with a pre-made ideal of perfection in its concept of God

(and with Christianity, Christ). This projection of the ideal is intended to give us something to aspire to, although we are not expected to ever reach perfection. Ayn Rand recognized the importance of having such symbols but, instead of presenting them as unreachable, she concretized the best possible in man with Howard Roark, then John Galt.

A hero serves as a model of what is possible to us. However, there is a problem here, similar to the problem of morality being based strictly on our generic nature. The hero is a general concept, something to which all of us can respond. We still need on a personal level something that concretizes our personal essence. This is the problem with asking ourselves, "What would Roark or Galt do?" when faced with a difficult situation. Some issues may have only one solution, and thinking of Roark or Galt may be of benefit. Others, however, may have several options, all equally moral, but involving a different style, priorities, interpretation of the same principles, etc. A hero cannot represent specifically how we, as individuals, should approach certain situations. To say that he does is to claim that we should all act the same given the same circumstances. This implies we all have identical values, priorities and methods for dealing with life. In other words, this belief holds we are all the same, a curious conclusion for an individualist philosophy.

I introduced the need for self-realization to account for our individual nature. We need this principle to apply rational self-interest to our particular lives. Likewise, we need to use our rational philosophy to set a human, realistic projection of who we are and might become as individuals. Robert Bidinotto elaborates:

Without a model of what is possible to man, it would be difficult to know what is possible to oneself. Heroic models inspire. One's own daimon concept is less an inspiration (although it is that) than it is a personal guide and source of confidence. A Howard Roark image can show an individual what is possible to any man of independence and integrity in pursuing any career; a personal daimon image can guide him in the actual, confident pursuit of his own career. The reason for the necessity of the daimon is that one cannot live the specifics of another's life, nor possess every trait of someone else. A daimon is an heroic projection of self.

One needs to perceive a total embodiment of one's ideals, not just an elaboration of abstract principles. One's subconscious -- the source of motivation -- operates not conceptually, but perceptually. Thus emotion (and motivation) can be tapped only by percepts, not concepts. One needs to know that his personal actions and character are valid, that personal success is possible -- and only an external hero, embodying one's values, can provide subconscious confirmation of that validity.

But the knowledge that some person has done something can never convince one's own subconscious that 'I can do it.' Many men have seen the greatness of

others, only to respond with self-doubt. The source of inspiration may be another; but the source of confidence must be a self-projection.<sup>24</sup>

The daimon, then, sets limits appropriate to our individual nature. It is the answer to the basic question of self-realization: what am I uniquely suited to do and become? It is our daimon, our personal projection, that can help us answer the questions of life. It will help us decide "This is (or is not) something I would do." It also sets a target towards which we constantly move "along lines of excellence." We need to design our daimon realistically, not so high that we are too intimidated to work towards it nor too low so that it offers no challenge. As we grow toward our daimon, we will need to expand and revise it.

The purpose is not to pursue our daimon as an end in itself. We create our daimon in order to achieve self-fulfillment or eudaimonia. We do not cultivate and exercise virtues as an end in itself. We refine, enhance and expand our abilities and virtues to meet the continually increasing challenges we choose (and which are thrown at us as well) to keep life interesting and to achieve our values. Our daimon is a tool for achieving happiness and for remaining happy.

It is not my purpose to discuss specifically how to define one's daimon, how to choose values appropriate to one's identity and to develop the virtues necessary to achieve those values. I hope that by drawing out these issues, the reader can start doing this on his own. I hope that by now the reader recognizes that self-interest just outlines the boundaries of legitimate human action. The map within those outlines and the path to personal fulfillment is drawn by self-realization.

By analyzing man's nature we learn what we as men should and should not do to protect our lives. We conclude that men should live by reason. Men should take responsibility for their lives. We then apply these conclusions to our life by saying, "Because I am a man, I should also live by reason. I should not obtain values by lying, cheating or coercion." This is still too abstract, however. Using "should" makes it sound like we are complying with a duty or a directive. The final step is to integrate moral principles and our own daimon, which culminates in this attitude: "I am the kind of person who lives by my reason. It is not in my character to live on unearned values. I am responsible for my life."

## NATURE OR NURTURE?

"But whatever their future, at the dawn of their lives, men seek a noble vision of man's nature and of life's potential." Ayn Rand, The Fountainhead.

To realize our self we first must consider the nature of our individual self. Miss Rand held that we are born tabula rasa -- that is, Man's mind has no conceptual content at birth, and his emotional mechanism is blank. I don't dispute this. But the nature and

structure of the brain is known to affect how we think and feel. The structure cannot be changed by sheer will.

There has been much debate over the amount of influence exerted by genes or environment on personality. One side claims our genes (nature) determines our personality, character and behavior, while the other side downplays genes and claims the environment or how we are nurtured is more important. This is the classic nature-nurture argument. (Rand seems to avoid being classified as either, by suggesting that, at some level, we choose our personality: we shape our selves.)

One of the most common methods of researching the influence of genetics is to study identical twins, who have identical genes -- particularly those separated at birth and raised independently. If they develop similar personality traits, these may be caused by genetic influences. Researchers compare such twins with fraternal twins (who don't have identical genes), especially those who were raised in the same family. If the same patterns don't emerge with the same statistical frequency, then it is likely that the trait shared by the identical twins is heritable.

The studies have uncovered several uncanny parallels between twins who are separated. Some have been found to be in the same occupation, have the same hobbies, drink the same beer, wear the same hair style, marry spouses with same first names, and so on. (This, of course, does not prove anything unless a similar study is done with randomly picked people to see how often such parallels occur.)

Such research has found few if any personality traits that are either derived 100% from nature or from nurture. Some seem more heavily influenced by genes; some more so by the environment or by later choices. Consequently, researchers assign percent values to indicate how much a role either factor plays. David Lykken, who participated in the University of Minnesota study of twins, says: "Genes do not fashion IQ or personality, they make proteins. And those proteins are many biochemical steps removed from the complex traits and abilities we see in a person. Our study and others show a good deal of what we are is heritable. But don't forget that heritability figures are estimates, not absolutes. Subsequent experience can sometimes overcome nature."<sup>25</sup>

This does not necessarily contradict Rand's position. Nor does it deny free will. It says that we are born with a specific nature that includes certain tendencies, not specific ideas or emotions. Using an analogy to explain this, we can drive a car just about anywhere: on interstate highways, rural roads or even off the road to a limited extent. It can traverse a wide variety of terrain from the flatland of the Midwest to the mountain roads of the Rockies. It needs a relatively smooth surface, it has a specific horsepower, it needs the right kind of fuel, etc. Our self is similar. We are limited by the nature of our brain/mind and our body.

The studies mentioned have found the following qualities to be influenced by heredity: artistic ability, basic mood, energy level, language skills (such as word fluency, timing of language acquisition, spelling, sentence construction), math skills and social style. How we react to the environment is also affected. This includes shyness, reaction to stress, alienation, extroversion-introversion, leadership, fears and phobias. It is also estimated that about 60% of our intelligence is heritable. All of the above qualities can ultimately affect or contribute to our basic temperament and our style of thinking. (See Robert Bidinotto's essay, "Objectivism and Styles of Thinking.")

The remaining 40% of our intelligence appears to be based on the nurturing we receive, and our own efforts. The other attributes influenced more by our choices or nurturing include self-image (how we evaluate our selves), attitude, achievement, aggression and social closeness.

The evidence shows we are born with certain tendencies. Temperamental differences exhibit themselves at birth. According to Wilson and Herrnstein in Crime and Human Nature: "The newborn child is biologically endowed with a predisposition to initiate contact with others by sucking, smiling, crying, vocalizing, or rooting about. Moreover, the vigor with which he or she displays these behaviors and the reaction he or she has to the response of others will be effected by temperamental qualities that are, to a degree, constitutional and thus precede parental socialization." <sup>26</sup> (As the father of identical twin girls I agree with this statement.)

Furthermore, "Alexander Thomas, Stella Chess and H. G. Birch were able to classify babies shortly after birth into three types -- 'easy children' (adaptable, cheerful, regular in body functions and sleep habits), 'difficult children' (withdrawn, intense, irregular in habits and given to crying), and 'slow to warm up children' (relatively inactive, slow to adapt, but not especially prone to tantrums). These qualities were independent of how the parents handled the infants, and tended to persist in most children for several years."<sup>27</sup>

We also know that much of a person's self-image and decisions about interests are made at an early age. By the time we reach adulthood, we have definite likes and dislikes, interests and disinterests, talents, beliefs and values. Many of them are so firmly entrenched that it would take an extraordinary effort to change them. Some might not be open to change.

These factors must be considered in weighing the specific decisions in our lives. The questions we should ask include: what do I want to do with my life -- in my career, my family, my relationship to others, in recreation, etc. What is my mission? How important are each of these activities? What are my strengths and how can I best apply them? What are my weaknesses and can they be changed? Do I want to? How do I change? Our answers to these will shape our "daimon," or idealized self-projection.

(These questions include the techniques of goal-setting and self-improvement, which go beyond the scope of our essay. There are many good books available on how to choose, prioritize and accomplish your goals. See the accompanying note for some suggestions.)<sup>28</sup>

## SELF-REALIZATION AND THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

"It is the sense that man's life is important, that great achievements are within one's capacity, and that great things lie ahead." Ayn Rand, The Fountainhead.

With the heavy emphasis Rand and her followers placed on reason, Objectivism's profound difference is easy to forget. Remember, the purpose of our life is to be happy by rational means, not just to be rational. Reason is a tool we use to secure happiness. Just as we do not idolize the hammers and saws we use to build our house, so should we not worship reason at the expense of our well-being. Reason employed in our self-interest and guided by the nature of our individual self for our self-realization form the constellation of conditions necessary for our well-being and self-fulfillment.

Maslow and Norton have suggested a way in which we may translate Rand's "Man's life" standard into specific guidance for daily living. There is still a missing element, however: motive.

Why do we, or should we, self-realize? Do we have an inherent duty to be excellent? (Norton and Maslow seem to suggest so.) Is self-realization an "ought" -- or an option? Indeed, what does it mean to "actualize the self"? And why should we?

Emotions may not be tools of cognition, as Miss Rand frequently reminded us, but they do provide the motive for what we do. The ultimate aim in life, after all, is not to be rational, but to be happy, which is an emotional state. All of our activities, such as working, playing, loving, etc., are just stepping stones to an emotion, which is an end in itself. Yes, dear reader, the purpose of life, and all we do is -- alas! -- EMOTIONAL: i.e., to be emotionally fulfilled. Eudaimonia is that fulfilled state; eudaimonism, as a philosophical theory, provides the principles we as individuals can use to reach that state.

How do we achieve this emotional state of well-being, the peak experiences Maslow wrote about? The work of a University of Chicago psychologist, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (pronounced "chik-sent-me-high-yee") sheds some light on this.

Csikszentmihalyi has studied "exceptional people" -- such as athletes, artists and surgeons -- whose work demands intense concentration. As Newsweek summarizes: "Repeatedly, they described a euphoric feeling of complete clarity of purpose. They also lost the normal sense of self in which one is both the actor and observer.

Irrelevant stimuli were shut out ... The subjects' sense of time was distorted, either stretched or, more typically, compressed....Finally, they had a sense of absolute mastery."<sup>29</sup>

Csikszentmihalyi describes these feelings as "flow states" (not unlike Maslow's peak experiences). He found that flow occurred when the skill matched the task. "When you encounter challenges that are greater than your skills, that's anxiety. When your skills exceed the challenges, that's boredom." To achieve "flow," we need to balance our skills with the challenges.

This research explains several things. It confirms a basic principle of goal-setting, in which we do best when we break a goal into incremental steps. Rather than "shooting for the moon" (which tends to freeze our motivation because of the goals' daunting magnitude), we should strive for goals that stretch us without overextending our reach. Our sense of efficacy grows as we reach one rung, then another, on our ladder of goals. These rungs, when properly spaced, provide an incentive for us to move up towards our ultimate goal or the highest symbol of our personal mythology. Our ultimate goal might be to run the company we work for; a first intermediate goal would be to become a section manager.

This also relates to Aristotle's definition of eudaimonia, and to the point that "vital powers" must be exercised "in a life affording them scope." Too limited a horizon of ambition truncates one's character; too distant a horizon overwhelms one. Only "knowing thyself" -- understanding honestly one's capacities and motives -- will let one plan out a series of manageable steps towards goals, which will amount to a career, or a well-lived life.

To ensure we achieve flow, we have to choose greater and greater challenges. We end up growing "along lines of excellence" because growth and reaching flow states require this. Flow also provides us with the reason for growing. It is not for the sake of being excellent as an end in itself, although we do progressively become better by this method. It is to keep our life interesting. We avoid anxiety by setting realistic goals; we avoid boredom by setting challenging goals. To be in the "flow" means doing things (actualizing) and doing them in such a way as to keep our interest.

Lou Tice distinguishes between concentration, in which we force ourselves to focus on a task, and fascination, where we are absorbed and drawn to the task. This is the difference between doing something strictly out of obligation and doing something for its enjoyment and end reward. We are drawn and absorbed when the activity challenges and interests us. To be of interest it has to be of value. To be a proper value it has to be in accordance with both of our natures -- the generic Man and the individual man.

Every parent knows from experience that children unconsciously strive to grow without any prodding. And when they acquire a new skill, such as walking, they're exuberant --

even if they aren't aware that someone is watching. The obvious emotional rewards of a sense of efficacy are enough. This emotional response to successful accomplishment seems "wired in" to our natures at birth. Indeed, it would be difficult to imagine why an infant would ever begin its heroic, stubborn, often painful quest for knowledge and self-mastery, were it not for some automatic emotional rewards, some intensely positive feedback, to spark and sustain that quest.

For the small child, self-realization is rewarded experientially. For him, eudaimonia is his natural state. It's a virtual metaphysical "given" in his life -- to him, the very purpose of life itself.

Obviously, somewhere en route to adulthood, many people lose that spirit of adventurous questing, that motivation to strive and achieve. If one indulges feelings of fear, laziness, or wishes contrary to fact, these will become a growing part of his life...and the state of eudaimonia will become less and less frequent. Soon, all of the moral and psychological aberrations so thoroughly catalogued by Ayn Rand and her associates will begin to manifest themselves. Eudaimonia will be forgotten beneath a growing mound of neuroses, and rationalizations for a wasted life. Lacking integrity, serenity and meaning -- lacking all kalon -- his life will sink into disdaimonia, or disharmony.

Part of the reason why we lose eudaimonia as our natural state is that as we mature into adults, we deal with broad abstractions and complex issues. Doing what was natural to us a child may not help us set priorities, or determine what is best for us in terms of both self-interest and self-realization. We need self-interest to define life-enhancing values and pursuits; we need self-realization to choose and prioritize those values that suit us best. The drive to self-realize may be inherent, but the guidance to do it correctly is not.

Let's apply self-realization to the five areas of life's enjoyment. In all of these areas, a strongly held, vivid image of one's own personal "daimon" -- or idealized self -- can help one resolve conflicts and untangle the personal decision-making process.

## **APPLYING SELF-REALIZATION**

"He thought that exultation comes from the consciousness of being guiltless, of seeing the truth and achieving it, of living up to one's highest possibility... ." Ayn Rand, The Fountainhead

### Career

Realizing involves "knowing thyself," as the Greeks would say, which helps us become ourselves. This process helps us determine which career is best suited to our

individual nature. We would each "consult our daimons," so to speak, to help make decisions.

A career in sales, for example, might be good for someone who likes dealing with people, is able to set his own schedule and is able to think on his feet. Conversely, computer design could be a suitable path for someone who prefers to work with machines, with less contact with people, etc. It would be ill- advised if a person in either job felt obligated to change to the other job merely for the sake of change or for a larger salary. The phrase "a fish out of water" comes to mind because it captures the sense of what such a person is trying to do. He would be going into a situation for which he is not suited. Essentially, he is leaving his world of computers or sales and entering an alien environment which will suffocate him.

Changing occupations need not be for irrational reasons, nor does it entail violating the principle of Man's life as the standard of value. That standard is silent on such issues.

In addition to balancing skills and challenges, we must also balance how we allocate our time and resources. We are rational, emotional, physical and social creatures. A career can express highly important parts of our personality and provide us with great satisfaction and rewards, but it is extremely unlikely to answer all of our needs. Our job may require considerable thought while demanding little of our physical abilities or answering few of our other emotional needs. Consequently, the needs of our "daimon" might not be satisfied unless we dedicate time to cultivate friendships, enjoy our family, participate in sports, go to movies and so on.

Just as working monomaniacally at our job can tip the balance towards unhealthiness and disdaimonia, so can it be possible for us to have too many pursuits, none of which add up to anything. There is no cleverly worded rule we can offer to determine when the balance point is found. One author has described living as a craft in which there are fixed principles but flexible strategies. I think this metaphor is an apt one. Adapting Rand's definition of art, we could say that living is the selective re-creation of reality according to our metaphysical beliefs and our "daimon." It is an integration of the self with our understanding of the world.

If we follow the lines of the Greek definition of eudaimonia, the vital powers we use in our career include reason, decision-making, creating values, and, for some professions, physical strength, endurance and skill. The excellence we strive for entails becoming more proficient, honing our abilities and expanding our skills. The scope afforded to us is the achievement of our values and goals as well as the income necessary to enjoy our other pursuits.

## Relationships -- family

Relationships, which cover everything from acquaintances to marriage, express the social side of our nature as the vital power. Even Objectivists, who tout the individualist theme, seem inexorably drawn to seek out each other's company, rather than to live a hermit's existence inside an alien culture. We seem to need the company of others, particularly those with whom we share something, whether it is biological common ground as in families, mutual values and beliefs such as with fellow Objectivists, or narrower interests such as stamp collecting, bowling or astronomy. Our "daimon," or idealized self-projection, must incorporate this fact.

Parents and their children often have strong ties, given the amount of time they spend together and the biological bond formed. A healthy family environment can be a source of vital encouragement, support and stability that is needed for young children if they are going to develop into adults with a high self-esteem.

The "vital powers" we express through our family help fulfill the social needs. Indeed, as Tu Wei-ming writes in The World & I, "The Confucians believe that our sympathetic bonding to our parents is not only biologically natural but morally imperative, for it is the first step in learning to appreciate ourselves not in isolation but in communication."<sup>30</sup>

Excellence in relating to our family would consist of being able to deal with them, even if they do not agree with our beliefs or values. It means being true to our values and beliefs while loving them as best we can (barring absolutely violent, fundamental disagreements) and encouraging them to realize their selves. As the Confucians believe, dealing with our family can be good preparation for coping with the outside world.

The scope family relationships offer is, at first, a safe harbor in which we as children can learn to sail before leaving for the rougher, uncertain water of the open ocean. Often, as we mature, we find that we have adopted values similar to our parents. The specific beliefs may differ, but the themes may be the same.

Child-rearing. Raising our own children presents a number of challenges to our ability to translate our abstract principles to a very concrete problem. We have noticed among Objectivists that this area often reveals how poorly they understand their principles.<sup>31</sup> But the vital powers we exercise combine our rationality, our ability to nurture and our skill in trying to influence our children to accept our input -- without any guarantee of success. If we are successful in being excellent parents, our children grow up to be confident, adventuresome and efficacious, while enjoying an open, stable relationship with us.

Child-rearing gives us a relationship unlike any other, which answers in part our social needs, and the satisfaction of knowing we played a part in preparing our child to live as an independent being -- a kind of surrogate self-realization for us, the parent.

## Relationships -- friends and acquaintances

The vital powers expressed through relationships are the same as with families. The range has been expanded though to include acquaintances, such as our work associates. With some of these acquaintances, we may even share the same sense of humor or enjoy the same sport. With friends, we share more values to varying degrees up to the point of being virtual soul mates.

Excellence in these relationships would consist of exploring the values and thoughts of our friends and learning from them. It would also mean sharing our insights without trying to coerce them into agreeing 100%. It entails the recognition that no two people, no matter how much they agree on basic principles, will always interpret those principles identically. There will be honest and honorable differences. In learning how to deal with others, we expand our understanding of how people think, act and react. And, with our closest friends, we can even experience the camaraderie Norton calls the "congeniality of excellences."

## Charity

Contributing our time and effort in charitable work expands our sphere of benevolent influence to people we may not know. The vital powers expressed further answer the need to expand our socialness and to share our "profit" in life with ours. Typically, people who engage in charities work in areas of personal interest. A mother loses a daughter to a drunk driver and in response organizes a political/support group, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, to prevent others from losing loved ones in the same manner and to help others survive their loss. A man's sister suffers from dyslexia which leads him to contribute his efforts in finding a way to minimize its effects. The desire is to have some effect in curing a problem, to have some positive effect on the world by reducing hardships or by helping others learn how to overcome obstacles. This is not necessarily altruism. To be altruistic, we would have to participate only out of duty and would get no benefit from it ourselves.

Excellence in this area occurs when we encourage someone to cope better with life's difficulties, whether it is helping them to learn to read, to learn how to regain their independence or, for those whose fate is cast by terminal illness, to provide comfort and the courage to live a life of worth to the end.

We would embark on such activity not because we feel it's our duty but because we can realize our values at times by sharing them with others. Or, we give precisely because we have realized our self and want to share this bounty. As David Norton states: "Generosity is not self-sacrifice but self-fulfillment. For the self-fulfilling life is not the life of idle self-indulgence but the life of meaningful work, and in meaningful work lies a native theme of generosity... Self-actualization expresses the intention to

live a worthy life which is, as objectively worthy, of worth to whomever is capable of appreciating it as such."<sup>32</sup>

This does not exhaust the potential motives for this endeavor. One could also argue that it is in our legitimate interest to help empower others to create their own values.

### Recreation

Recreation, whether it is a hobby, sport or entertainment, offers the potential use of the powers of our mind -- both the rational and emotional, conscious and subconscious -- and our body. We may have to employ our mind to develop a strategy or to concentrate on performing a complex task. Our emotions may be pulled in by the heat of competition or the drive to excel and win. Many sports involve the body as well, calling upon our coordination, agility, power and speed.

To do so along lines of excellence we strive for mastery, for proficiency, for continual improvement in our skills. We should note that mastery does not mean perfection. Even the best in any given field are constantly looking for ways to improve their abilities. As we move toward mastering a field, we also tend to notice nuances and subtleties that elude the beginner.

Recreation adds scope by offering an avenue outside of our career for developing a mastery that we do not depend on for earning a living. We can engage in a recreation without worrying whether we will be good enough at it to pay the bills. Because a career does not necessarily answer all our needs, recreation adds the variety to life needed to ensure we are balanced. An unbalanced tire, for instance, will bounce as it rolls on the road. As the speed increases, so do the forces generated by the imbalance. If out of balance badly enough, the tire will wear unevenly, place undue stress on the shock absorbers and possibly make the car unpleasant to ride in and difficult to control. Not accounting for the need for balance in life can cause similar problems. Not acknowledging our unique individual natures in choosing what recreations to enjoy is like installing different size tires on a Porsche and wondering why it handles like a Pinto.

### Art

Ayn Rand wrote that art refuels us spiritually. It concretizes our deepest values. This is the primary power art offers, although it may also spur our imagination, create a particular mood or atmosphere (such as relaxation) and provide us with vivid symbols, even mythology, for our inspiration. The world and characters of Atlas Shrugged, for instance, are almost real in the minds of Rand's followers. Galt's Gulch has the same mythic power as that of Atlantis, or heaven.

Excellence in art entails continual improvement in our ability to discriminate subtleties, just as with recreation. As our skill and knowledge improve, we can penetrate through

the first layer of art to deeper ones (assuming they exist -- the artist, too, improves his ability to fold in meaning as he pursues the excellence of his art). Again, Atlas Shrugged can be appreciated on several levels.

The scope art adds to life includes the celebration of values plus inspiration, recuperation and, in some cases, just pure relaxation or entertainment. Because of our differing individual natures, styles of thinking, temperaments and values, we may respond differently to the same art. Some might find classical music the best there is, while someone else may think it's boring or too abstract and prefer jazz instead. We don't all have to respond the same way to rational art. Within the rational range, each of us may respond to the art that answers our particular needs.

## Sex

For the purpose of this discussion, I'm going to expand this topic to include the romantic relationship that is usually the context for sex. Through the union with a partner who shares our values we can experience the climax of the physical, emotional and the metaphysical. Romantic love celebrates our values in an emotional and physical form (whereas art does so in a more abstract and private manner). To find a partner, we need more than someone who just happens to espouse the same beliefs. Romance integrates the expression of the soul in all its aspects -- sense of life, values, style, humor, excitement, etc.

We are excellent partners and participants when we successfully abandon ourselves in the relationship with the other person, when we can express our sexual power and when we are sensitive to our partners needs as well (since romance and sex is a cooperative venture!).

\* \* \* \*

Obviously, the above discussion is not meant to represent all that can be said on self-realization. Others may disagree with how I have applied the Greek notion of eudaimonism (i.e., vital powers, excellence, scope). My purpose here is not to give final answers but to open the door to further discussion. These are issues that you have to sort out for yourself. If I were to provide a cookbook of how to apply these concepts to your individual life, I would be violating my own thesis. These principles, however, should provide more specific help in how to translate Objectivism to your own life.

## SELF-REALIZATION AND VIRTUE

"The kalon is a uniquely Greek concept...and involves performing a moral act with grace and balance...,doing the right thing, on the right occasion, toward the right people, for the right reason, and in the right manner, the performance and witnessing of which is aesthetically satisfying. Thus the kalon can be best translated as either the morally noble or the morally beautiful." -- Jack Wheeler, "Rand and Aristotle: A Comparison of Objectivist and Aristotelian Ethics"<sup>33</sup>

Rational self-interest includes two concepts: self-interest and rationality. Up to this point we have been discussing primarily the concept of self-interest and its application to the pursuit of values. Rationality takes us more into the virtues. If self-realization helps us narrow our choice of values in a way that self-interest cannot, it would follow that the virtues Rand explained do not cover all aspects of self-realization. Her virtues derive from rationality as a tool for survival. Focusing strictly on survival, however, does not help us answer many questions in life. We need additional virtues to apply self-realization.

What about those cases where we have to work in cooperation or collaboration with others? There are few cases where we can achieve our values without interacting in some fashion with another person. Although our defining characteristic is reason, there is much more to the concept of being human. We have a physical body, a psychological side, a social side, etc., each with its own needs.

Edmund Pincoffs in Quandaries and Virtues<sup>34</sup> proposes a list of virtues in addition to those based strictly on rationality, which we reproduce here (slightly abridged) for our discussion. We will explain each of his subdivisions.

*INSTRUMENTAL VIRTUES*

<b>AGENT INSTRUMENTAL</b>	<b>GROUP INSTRUMENTAL</b>
Persistence	Cooperativeness
Courage	“practical wisdom”
Alertness	The virtues of leaders and followers
Resourcefulness	
Prudence	
Energy	
Strength	
Cool-headedness	
Determination	

*NONINSTRUMENTAL VIRTUES*

<b>AESTHETIC</b>	
Noble	Charming
Dignity	gracefulness
Virility	Wittiness
Magnanimity	Vivaciousness
Serenity	Imaginativeness
Nobility	Whimsicality
	Liveliness

<b>MELIORATING</b>		
Mediating	Temperamental	Formal
Tolerance	Gentleness	Civility
Reasonableness	Humorousness	Politeness
Tactfulness	Amiability	Decency
	Cheerfulness	Modesty
	Warmth	Hospitableness
	Appreciativeness	Unpretentiousness
	Openness	
	Even-temperedness	
	Noncomplainingness	
	Nonvindictiveness	

<b>MORAL</b>	
<u>Mandatory</u>	<u>Nonmandatory</u>
Honest	benevolence
Sincerity	Sensitivity
truthfulness	Forgivingness
Loyalty	Understandingness
Consistency	super honesty
Reliability	super conscientiousness
Dependability	super reliability
trustworthiness	
Nonrecklessness	
Nonnegligence	
Nonvengefulness	
Nonbelligerence	
Nonfanaticism	

As the chart shows Pincoffs breaks virtues into instrumental and noninstrumental. Instrumental virtues are those that directly help us gain and/or keep values. Noninstrumental virtues, therefore, are those concerned with how well we pursue our values. They assume the existence of the instrumental virtues and deal with how we execute them. Under instrumental, there are two sub-groups: agent and group. The virtues under agent loosely correlate to Rand's list of virtues. Some of them, like energy and strength, are more specific than Rand's.

For projects in which we need the cooperation or participation of others (such as managing a division in our company) the virtues under group apply.

The noninstrumental virtues are broken into three classes: moral, meliorating and aesthetic. I include them here not so much because I agree entirely with his choices of virtues included in each category. I do think his general approach addresses the aspects of our nature that contribute to our self-realization. For instance, I disagree with the designation of the class of virtues concerned with being sensitive to the needs of others as "moral", which is the more traditional conception of the word. I would also relocate some of the virtues, such as honesty, truthfulness and reliability to instrumental because an argument can be made for these qualities being necessary outgrowths of being rational, i.e., being truthful to reality and not trying to obtain values by coercion or deceit. But many of the other virtues involve how we relate to others and hence are less "survival" oriented. (Although someone probably could make a case for these being instrumental as well if one is going to live as a participant of society.)<sup>35</sup>

Meliorating virtues are those which help us live with others. They make us easier and more pleasant to live with and include mediating, formal and temperamental virtues. Mediating virtues (tolerance, reasonableness and tactfulness) helps us in negotiating

and persuading others to see our point of view. Formal virtues (civility, politeness, decency, etc.) set the basis for public behavior. We all benefit by agreeing to some common ground rule for treating others (like traffic regulations), whether or not we know them. Obviously, temperamental virtues (gentleness, humor<sup>36</sup>, cheerfulness, etc.) reflect our emotional makeup and affect our style of presenting ourselves.

Being noble and charming, two categories of aesthetic virtues, "are appreciated for what they are, for the vision of themselves; we are grateful for their presence; they are exemplars of what humans can be; their absence is regretted because it impoverished life."<sup>37</sup>

Space does not permit us to even briefly discuss each virtue above (perhaps a future project). We do want to say that many of these appear to be concerned with how others perceive us, thus raising the possibility of being motivated out of social metaphysics. Although it is possible to practice these virtues in an attempt to impress or sway others, it is also possible to practice them simply because we want to, for our own sake, as an expression of our daimon. We have to live with who we are and how we relate to the world. We should be happy with this relationship, which includes people we have chosen as friends. If we value our friends, we also value how they perceive us. This too, would influence how we act. If we are constantly morose, bitter or cynical, we have diluted or completely destroyed the pleasure of being alive.

These virtues can be the stylistic expressions of our personal vision of how a worthy life should be lived. Although they may not directly help us achieve our goals, they can make it easier. They can reduce the strife and stress in our lives, without sacrificing our principles. People tend to be more cooperative, helpful and respectful if we treat them with respect, if we are reasonable in our dealings, and if it is a pleasure to work with us. If we create unnecessary conflict with others, we could waste energy trying to overcome their resistance.

Consider two Objectivists possessing vastly different styles. One exhibits the virtues we have just discussed; the other is cold, withdrawn, humorless (except to laugh at the "irrationality" of others), unsympathetic and dispenses harsh moral judgments at the slightest provocation. In the long run (or even the short run!), who will be happier?

The judgmental Objectivist's life is one string of constant disagreements and diatribes. Many of these start with his pronouncements on the alleged irrationality or immorality of others. Consequently, he establishes a reputation for being harsh, uncooperative, even a "kook".

The self-realizing Objectivist resists chronic moral pronouncements because he recognizes that most people never heard of Ayn Rand, let alone rational self-interest. He knows most people have accepted their beliefs through cultural osmosis and that many have never had any training in how to think. And, if Objectivism's moral precepts were so obvious, why did only Rand formulate them? Why didn't he come up with

them? He does not shun moral judgment nor is he motivated to have other people like him at any cost; he saves condemnation for the appropriate (and usually rare) occasion. More importantly, even if the majority of people around him are irrational, he may still choose to express his disagreement tactfully because that is in accordance with his daimon. He may be more reserved in his method of handling these issues than someone who faces life with a more dramatic and bombastic flair.

The self-realizing Objectivist recognizes that his life is a work of art, shaped by his choices and his interaction with the world. Life is self-generated action, which typically occurs in a social context. He usually has to deal with other people, whether it is his opponent in a game of chess, his co-workers or his family.

As Pincoffs writes:

A full view of the problems of ethics inevitably extends our horizon from acts and problems to lives. We should not ask merely what the situation is that gives rise to the problem; we should also take into account the moral direction of lives. There are matters of moral biography and autobiography that cannot be ignored. The individual may want to know what he is making of his life, what he is becoming, what style of life he has fallen into, whether he is moving in the direction of some ideal. These questions about moral life do not have to do with honors awarded or merit accumulated; they have to do with what warrants the honors and with the credit balance of merit. They do not have to do with acts alone; they also have to do with the tendencies, attitudes, and dispositions of which the acts may be indicative.... They tell us something about our progress or the lack of it.

It could be argued that moral worth is only to be found in the person who is to some degree conscious of his failings and vices, his virtues and triumphs, who examines his motives, questions his intentions, praises and blames himself, and urges himself on. In the process of self-formation he may keep ideals and models before him.<sup>38</sup>

## IN CLOSING

The thunderstorm is one of nature's most powerful and awesome creations. What starts as an invisible rising column of warm air turns into a mass of wind, rain and lightning that can tower up to 12 miles above the earth. Its inherent power, if harnessed, could supply the electricity for several cities. In Atlas Shrugged, John Galt invented a machine for tapping the static electricity in the air which, if he had made it available to mankind, would have changed the world.

Your daimon is that thunderstorm; a rational philosophy -- Objectivism -- is that machine. Objectivism, like Galt's invention, is a majestic achievement laced with the

brilliant insights of an extraordinary woman. It offers the promise of helping people unleash their enormous potential. The machine, however, is not quite finished. A vital part of its circuitry is missing, thus thwarting the process of converting our energy into achievement and success. When that circuit is missing, the storm can either dissipate, its energy unspent and diluted, or it can unleash its potential randomly, with no direction, in blinding, violent bolts that can splinter lives, tear relationships asunder and leave a scarred, blackened and twisted landscape.

Self-realization bridges that gap. It completes the circuit. It allows us, like Prometheus, to tap the awesome heavenly fire of the gods. It empowers us to achieve the values we have chosen. I hope my essay will help some of you who were drawn to Objectivism but felt something vital was missing. More importantly, I hope my work will make it easier for you to tap and express your daimon and realize, as Miss Rand said in Atlas Shrugged, the best within you.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Although this essay lists one author, it has many contributors. Carl Harvey provided the original impetus and continuing input as it evolved. Robert Bidinotto and his wife, Margaret, who agree with me in principle (although perhaps not with everything I've said), helped restructure and re-focus its content. My wife, Claudia, encouraged me while setting an example of what it means to live a worthy life. I've benefited from many conversations with Carl, Bob, Margaret and Claudia. The cause of some of the thinking that started this project was my twin daughters, Kristina and Nicole (born March 10, 1988). They brought home the question of how to integrate parenthood with self-interest.

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## NOTES

1. Nathaniel Branden, "The Psychology of Pleasure," in The Virtue of Selfishness (New York: New American Library, 1962), 62.
2. Sometimes, though, signals get crossed. In the early 1970s, many Objectivists took a fancy to the glowing childhood-fantasy paintings of Maxfield Parrish. At one Ford Hall Forum, someone asked Ayn Rand for her assessment of his work, to which she curtly replied: "Trash." One could almost hear the bonfires raging across the country.
3. "Perfectionism" rears its head here. Objectivists tend to incorrectly expand moral perfection to mean never making mistakes -- which leads to perpetual study. In the process, they switch from a value focus to a virtue focus.
4. Unfortunately, Miss Rand also seemed to assume that if people held ideas that appeared irrational to her, they were motivated out of the desire to evade reality. See Robert J. Bidinotto's "Facts, Values and Moral Sanctions: An Open Letter to Objectivists." I have taught with Carl Harvey classes on a laymen's introduction to critical thinking at an adult education school. Our students, who come from all walks of life, have told us that they want to learn how to use their minds better. They have no prior knowledge of logic or critical thinking. Is it any wonder that they hold beliefs Objectivists would consider irrational? Is it surprising they would not know how to cope with Objectivism? As far as we could tell, they had no desire to evade the truth. It's simply that the inability to think in abstractions or in principle renders many people incapable of critically evaluating Objectivism or even their own beliefs. Objectivism looks and sounds alien to the altruist ideas they absorbed from the culture, so they reject it intellectually, while often living their lives according to the spirit of Objectivism.

Furthermore, Objectivists fail to ask some crucial questions. If the culture is so thoroughly evil, so anti-life and anti-man, why hasn't it collapsed? Why do we still progress? Why are so many activities in our culture, such as entertainment, the glorification of romantic love, sports etc., geared for our happiness?

5. It is interesting to note that various surveys, such as those conducted by Psychology Today, show that about 60% to 70% of Americans rate themselves as happy.
6. Ayn Rand, The Virtue of Selfishness, "The Objectivist Ethics," 24.
7. Robert J. Bidinotto, Objectivism and Styles of Thinking, (New Castle, PA: Broadsheet Publishing).

8. Here again, moral perfectionism plays a role. Although Rand did not intend for reason to be an end in itself, her concept of moral perfection certainly has that air to it. Harry Binswanger adds to this in his "The Possible Dream" (The Objectivist Forum) when he says "'moral perfection' means the principle of morality (the commitment to reason) carried through without exception to every choice one confronts." Notice how this is formulated. Happiness is not mentioned. One would think that if moral perfection has any validity, it should entail consistently pursuing rational happiness. Being rationally happy is not the same thing as being "rational."
9. David Norton, Personal Destinies: A Philosophy of Ethical Individualism (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), ix.
10. John Cooper, Reason and Human Good in Aristotle (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1986), 116.
11. Ayn Rand, Atlas Shrugged, "Galt's speech".
12. Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics, Book I.
13. Jack Wheeler, in The Philosophic Thought of Ayn Rand, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984), "Rand and Aristotle: A Comparison of Objectivist and Aristotelian Ethics."
14. Abraham Maslow, The Further Reaches of Human Nature (New York: Penguin Books, 1971), 46.
15. Abraham Maslow, "Theory of Human Motivation," quoted in Charles Murray, In Pursuit of Happiness and Good Government (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 141.
16. Insight alone does not necessarily create change in our behavior. We need to act which gives us the sense of efficacy needed to spur us on.
17. Gail Sheehy, Pathfinders (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), 285.
18. Charles Garfield, Peak Performers (New York: William Morrow & Co., Inc., 1986), 52.
19. *Ibid.*, 115.

20. Louis Tice, "Thought Patterns of High Performance People." (Audio tape)
21. David Norton, Personal Destinies, ix.
22. Norton, Personal Destinies, 15.
23. Ibid., 16.
24. Robert Bidinotto, The Relationship of the Daimon Concept to Action, (unpublished paper, 1982).
25. David Lykken, "The Eerie World of Reunited Twins," Discover (September 1987), 41.
26. Wilson and Herrnstein, Crime and Human Nature (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), 218.
27. Ibid., 219.
28. James W. Newman, Release Your Brakes (New York: Warner Books, 1977); Robert Schuller, You Can Become The Person You Want To Be (New York: Jove/HBJ, 1973); Wayne Dyer, The Sky's The Limit (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980); Anthony Roberts, Unlimited Power (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986); Dennis Waitley, Seeds of Greatness (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1983); Alan Lakein, How To Get Control of Your Time and Your Life (New York: New American Library, 1973), and George Weinberg, The Action Approach (New York: New American Library, 1969). This last book has a message that is often lost in self-help and in therapies: you have to act to change. Insights and introspection are fine, but they need to be applied in action to create change.
29. Newsweek, "Going With The Flow," June 2, 1986.
30. Tu Wei-ming, "Embodying the Universe," The World & I, August 1989, pg. 480.
31. For instance, does encouraging a child to be independent mean allowing her to be totally undisciplined or does it mean allowing her the freedom appropriate for her stage of development? Does discipline mean lecturing a 2-year-old who does not understand such abstract concepts? Or, does it mean figuring out how a 2-year-old thinks and perceives the world and then acting accordingly? Does teaching a child to think mean drilling him in Aristotelian logic or, instead, getting him to ask the right questions? Is it important to teach him politeness? If so, why and how? In the

process of answering these questions, the parent has to recognize his child's nature while at the same time employing his daimon in raising the child.

32. David Norton, "Liberty, Virtue, and Self-Improvement: A Eudaimonist Perspective," Reason Papers (#12), 1987, 11.
33. Appears in The Philosophic Thought of Ayn Rand, edited by Douglas J. Den Uyl and Douglas B. Rasmussen.
34. Edmund Pincoffs, Quandaries and Virtues (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1986).
35. Let's take honesty as an example. One can be dishonest (although we are not making a case for doing so) without inevitably becoming more and more a scoundrel. We have free will, so anywhere along the path we can choose to stop being irrational. Being dishonest also undercuts a vital principle of living well. And, there is more to dishonesty than just lying to others in order to obtain a value unjustly. We can also be untrue to our selves by deluding ourselves into a course of action that contradicts our basic nature. Lying to others can also mean we are untrue to our potential if we believe we have to "fake it to make it."
36. Humor seems to play an insignificant role in the lives of the people we met, unless it was to mock the stupidity of the non-objectivist world. Rand supported this view in one of the question-and-answer periods of a taped lecture. She said laughter is appropriate when making fun of a negative behavior such as a snooty dowager slipping on a banana peel. This covers satire and spoofs, but there is much more to humor than this. What about puns, which just play on the meanings of words? Or jokes about absurdities of life? The exclusive focus on morality, of right and wrong, spills over into the Objectivist view of humor which does not necessarily have to involve either tearing down the good or satirizing the irrational. It can be just plain fun.

As Nancy Sherman summarizes Aristotle's position on humor and wit (in Midwest Studies in Philosophy, Volume XIII), "Their presence implies that the individual who is so relentless at her moral labors that she no longer enjoys or pursues more trivial pursuits, who does good doggedly but humorlessly, without a trace of lightness or wit, falls short of the ideal. Thus the person who fails to notice the absurd side of life, who forgets to laugh at such moments, has in a sense forgotten how to live. ... To forget that human pleasure is to be dead somewhere inside. Indeed, the elderly, Aristotle mockingly implies, may already be dead in just that way. Hardened by life's misfortunes, for them the absurd is cause not for sarcasm, but for resignation. Peevishness supplants humor, cynicism replaces hope."

37. Edmund Pincoffs, Quandaries and Virtues, 86.

38. *Ibid.*, 128.