

CHAPTER 4: SPIRITUAL AND SOCIAL VALUES

The Cardinal Values

We've now established the central role of reason in human survival. With his open-ended, objective knowledge, derived by reason, man is able produce his material values in limitless ways. Just as the cognitive use of reason allows man to acquire knowledge indefinitely, using each new conclusion as a stepping-stone to the next, so the productive use of reason allows man to create wealth indefinitely, using each new achievement as a stepping-stone to the next. Taking this as background, we are ready to demonstrate how spiritual values fit into the structure of Objectivism. We will start with the most abstract, yet from a personal point of view, most important, spiritual values. These are the values that orient the rest of the ethics. Ayn Rand called them the *cardinal values* of Objectivism: reason, purpose and self-esteem¹.

To live, man must hold three things as the supreme and ruling values of his life: Reason — Purpose — Self-Esteem. Reason, as his only tool of knowledge — Purpose, as his choice of the happiness which that tool must proceed to achieve — Self-Esteem, as his inviolate certainty that his mind is competent to think and his person is worthy of happiness, which means: is worthy of life.²

The cardinal values are not external goods, things we get from the environment. They are fundamental aspects of the process of living. We have a psychological need to hold these values consciously, to esteem them, because doing so provides us with an objective internal orientation toward the world and toward our own lives. This is why the cardinal values are best understood not as particular things we aim to gain and keep, once and for all, but as values that we reaffirm with every thought and act.

Our need for these cardinal values follows from the fact that we have free will. Most organisms automatically act to support their lives, but Man's nature is different. We must choose our values, and it is only by choosing to act in support of our lives that we can achieve well-being. This choice is *the choice to live*.

Ayn Rand held that all of ethics should be based on following through, rigorously and consistently, on the choice to live. In diagram 2.1 we saw, in

concluding that life is the ultimate value, that a key premise for that conclusion was the need for consistency in one's hierarchy of means and ends, i.e. in one's values. On a day-to-day basis, holding one's life as one's ultimate value is not a trivial task. To consistently pursue the aim of living, one has to have a clear idea of its key elements, and one must be motivated psychologically to exert the effort required to uphold those elements. By consciously holding the cardinal values as our highest spiritual values, we can orient our pursuit of life on the basis of essentials. In other words, holding the cardinal values gives clear, psychological content to the choice to live.

Diagram 4.1: The Cardinal Values

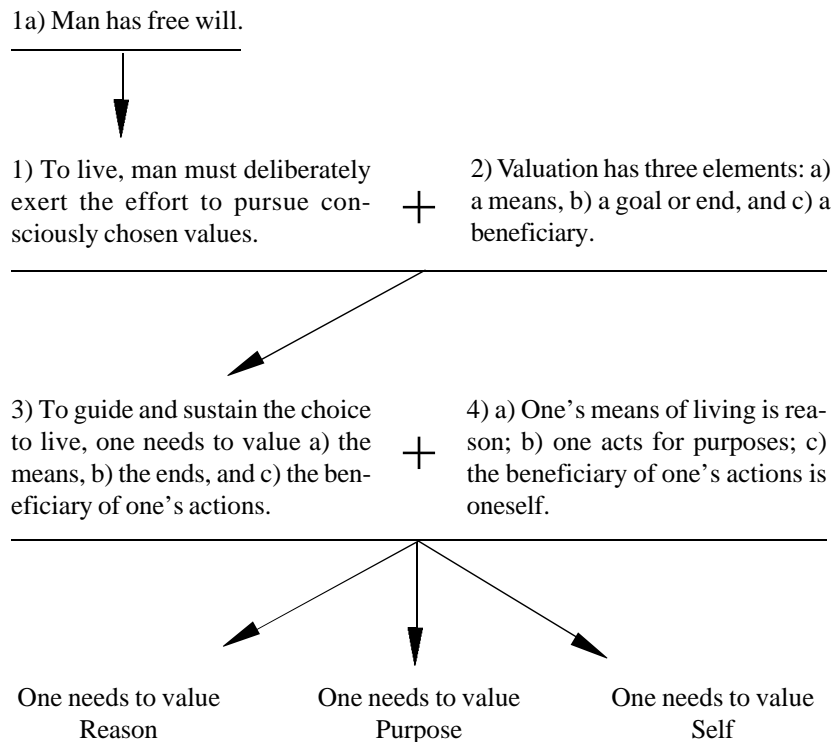


Diagram 4.1 takes us step by step through this reasoning. As we go through it, the essential connection between the cardinal values and the choice to live will become more apparent.

Premise 1a restates the fact that **man has free will**, which, as we have seen, is an axiomatic fact of which we are directly aware in every conscious thought. Free will is actually a complex phenomenon, because it is not merely the fact that we can cause our own actions, but that we can do so self-consciously. From this, we can infer the conclusion stated as **Premise 1: To live, man must deliberately exert the effort to pursue consciously chosen values.** Our free will precludes our seeking values automatically, as other organisms do. Of course our bodies pursue many values automatically—digestion of food, circulation of the blood, etc.—but we could not survive long without values gained through conscious action. The most abstract way of expressing this truth is that, in order to live, we must choose to do so.

Recall that in Chapter 2, we concluded our examination of the biocentric essence of the concept of “value” by recognizing that **valuation has three elements: a) a means, b) a goal or end, and c) a beneficiary.** This inductive generalization is **Premise 2.** In Chapter 2, we saw that each of these three major elements is present in the basic features of any goal-directed action:

- a) Goal-directed action involves the exercise of a capacity
- b) Goal-directed action is directed to an end, i.e. something valued
- c) Goal-directed action is for the sake of its agent

Let’s take a perfectly mundane case of human value-seeking: going for a jog. How would we analyze this action? The end the jogger seeks is physical fitness, to which the exercise contributes. The means of achieving fitness is the physical activity of running, for which one needs the capacities of healthy legs, back, heart, and so on, and the will to direct those physical capacities. Finally, someone stands to benefit from the action: the jogger, whose ability to live is enhanced by his fitness. We can break down any value-seeking action into these three elements.³

Premises 1 and 2 of Diagram 4.1 lead us to conclude that **to guide and sustain the choice to live, one needs to value a) the means, b) the ends, and c) the beneficiary of one’s actions.** This conclusion appears as **Premise 3** on the diagram. Please note that “to value” in this case means not simply to pursue an end, but to esteem that end consciously as well. Holding the cardinal values means doing so consciously, as an explicit choice.

Premise 4 expresses these elements of human valuing in more specific terms: **a) One’s means of living is reason; b) One acts for purposes; c) The beneficiary of one’s actions is oneself.** This is the basis of the cardinal values of Reason, Purpose and Self. Each of the cardinal values corresponds to a fundamental element of goal-directed action. In other words, every action we take in support of our lives implicitly involves the pursuit of these three essential values. Because they are essential, to the extent that one fails uphold any one of

them in the course of one's actions, one fails to act for one's life.

We can therefore reach three **conclusions** from premises 3 and 4, corresponding in turn to parts a, b, and c of those premises. The first conclusion is that **one needs to value Reason** as one's most essential and most powerful capacity for action. The second is that **one needs to value Purpose**, i.e. one's values and ends. Finally, **one needs to value Self**: oneself as the proper beneficiary of one's actions.

As Diagram 4.1 makes clear, the choice to live amounts to the choice to use one's reason, to act for one's purposes, and to act for oneself. Holding these three values as guiding, overarching, *cardinal* values is our means of consciously orienting our actions around the choice to live, and motivating ourselves to continue to exert the effort that the choice to live requires. In a sense, then, each of the cardinal values is simply the ultimate value of one's own life, seen from a particular angle. In affirming any of the cardinal values, one is affirming an essential, constituent aspect of the process of living of itself. As will be clearer shortly when we discuss each of them in turn, the cardinal values involve a rich appreciation of what it means to live as a human being and what that life requires.

Being elements of valuing, the cardinal values both abstract aspects of life, and orient us toward certain actions. As we describe them in more detail, we will often touch on policies of action in discussing our proper orientation toward action. Some of the generalizations about policies of action will require further elaboration, which we will provide in Chapter 5, when we discuss the virtues of rationality, productiveness, and pride. The discussions of inductive evidence that accompany the presentation of each cardinal value should help you grasp clearly the content of these orientations as values, and it is this content that we will be using in future diagrams to develop the structure of the ethics.

These values are implicit in a healthy, happy life, which depends on the actual use of one's mind to achieve goals that benefit oneself. But one cannot expect to achieve these values with any consistency without making them *explicit*. Indeed, the failure to hold them explicitly and to pursue them by conscious, deliberate choice has caused a great deal of unnecessary suffering, grief, and death.

Consider, for instance, someone who wants to live a happy, healthy life, but deprecates reason. Such a person would tend to slide into emotionalism and a short-sighted hedonism. A similar person who deprecates purpose instead of reason would tend towards a classic pragmatism, and would find little satisfaction in a life of conflicting aims and unpleasant long-term consequences. Someone who deprecates self is perhaps the most frightening of all, because he will usually embrace some larger beneficiary of his actions, such as God, Virtue, the State, or perhaps the Race. From such a mold have sprung not merely

relatively benign figures like Mother Teresa, but Hitler and Torquemada as well.

There is an illuminating analogy between the cardinal values and the axioms of awareness with which we began this book. The axioms are implicit in every moment of awareness, but holding them explicitly allows us objectively to orient our thinking, which, being free, is prone to drift into errors such as contradiction, wishful thinking, or failure to check one's thinking against the facts. Denying the axioms leads to inaccurate thinking and undermines one's knowledge, while attending to them helps to ensure objectivity.

Similarly, the cardinal values are implicit in every value-seeking act. But holding them explicitly allows us objectively to orient our values, which, being freely chosen, are prone to errors such as conflicting aims, self-destructiveness, and the indulgence of subjective wishes that Ayn Rand called "whim worship." Denying the cardinal values undermines one's life and creates unhappiness, while esteeming them helps to ensure that one's pursuit of values is properly life-affirming.

From this, we can see that to uphold the cardinal values is to uphold the choice to live without contradiction or diversion. This is not trivial; it requires a continual conscious commitment. To see this in more detail, we will now consider the meaning of each the cardinal values in turn:

Reason as a Cardinal Value

Many people have noticed the curious fact that Rand describes reason not only as a virtue — rationality — but also as a value; not only as a means to our ends, but as one of our ends. She did this because, as we have seen, reason as a faculty does not operate or develop automatically. It is our most important capacity, and we need to understand its nature and value it consciously.

To value reason is to value the processes and cognitive products of the mind, in all their various forms. Valuing it means valuing one's cognitive contact with existence. In addition, because reason is one's capacity for a *conceptual* awareness of the world, valuing reason means valuing the integrated, self-directed, open-ended acquisition of conceptual knowledge, by means of observation and logical integration.

We saw in Chapter 1 that reason integrates the evidence of the senses (Diagram 1.4), and that it must adhere to the standard of objectivity if its integrations are to produce knowledge of the world (Diagram 1.5). *Integration* and *objectivity* are thus the two essential poles of reason as a cardinal value, values we aim at, implicitly, in all rational cognition. The unit-economy of concepts (Diagram 3.4), propositions, and principles (Diagram 3.5) results from integration. The process of concept-formation (Diagram 1.2) is integrative, as is the inductive learning by which we expand our knowledge. So to value reason as the engine of integration means to esteem the constant acquisition of knowledge and the cultivation of skills such as logic, literacy, numeracy, and rhetoric

(skills that can serve both poles, but that can only be acquired by integration).

The pole of objectivity regulates and corrects our integrative processes. Objectivity is based, as we have seen, on the recognition that knowledge is contextual and volitional (Diagram 1.5), and thus subject to error. Its methods include the reduction of abstractions to their basis in perception (Diagram 1.2) and the employment of the canons of deductive and inductive inference.⁴ Our use of principles of logic to achieve objectivity is one instance of the broader fact that principles as such are vital means of checking the consistency of our knowledge (Diagram 3.5). Objectivity means trusting in one's own perception of reality as the final test of one's conclusions. To value reason as objective means appreciating the harm that internal conflicts and contradictions can cause if allowed to fester unresolved, and being psychologically open to the potential for error: certainty does not justify a closed mind. Because our means of tolerating contradictions in our thinking is evasion, to value reason is to despise evasion, especially in oneself.

A failure to appreciate the inseparable character of these two poles of reason underlies the epistemological errors of mysticism and skepticism. Mystics have felt "limited" by the demands of objectivity. Skeptics have rebelled at the effort and judgment that integration requires. Both deprecate the human mode of knowing the world, when they rather should celebrate it. A faculty that one deprecates is not likely to be used properly, nor to its fullest potential. This is not merely a matter for intellectuals or scholars; in ordinary life, an appreciation of the powers of one's capacity for knowledge, and the benefits that flow from it, are what motivates one to improve one's thinking skills and enrich one's sphere of knowledge.

In addition to the evidence of the value of reason that we have already discussed and analyzed, we can draw on social science for direct evidence of the need to regard reason as a fundamental, orienting value. For instance, psychologists note that to the extent that a person disables his means of grasping reality, he tends to also lose his sense of control, leaving him prey to rootless, floating anxieties. These anxieties can be extremely debilitating and distracting. The subject is thus less able to secure his well-being, not only because of his irrationality, but also because of the indirect effects of suffering under anxiety.⁵ There is also psychological research showing that a commitment to active thinking and to the use of one's rational faculties helps deter senescence and improves quality of life for the aged.⁶

History is another source of evidence: we can observe the pernicious effects of irrational zealotry on people in the past (and even the present) in such episodes as religious wars. Examples include Europe's Thirty Years War, a religious war that laid waste to Germany; China's mysticism-inspired Taiping Rebellion; and the post Cold-War sectarian genocide in Yugoslavia. Deprecation or misunderstanding of reason and its requirements have played an important

role in avowedly “rational” social movements such as those that drove the French and Russian Revolutions, respectively, to their destructive culminations. Of course, such assessments of historical events rest on analyses of these episodes too detailed for us to present here; we can only suggest further readings.⁷

Speaking more generally, we can see that there have been periods in history, such as the European Dark Ages (circa 400AD–circa 1200AD), when the elevation of faith above reason was associated with widespread suffering and high mortality rates. Similarly, we can observe periods or places dominated by a rational, inductive spirit, such as the Anglo-American Enlightenment (circa 1690AD–circa 1812 AD) or China’s Song Dynasty (960AD–1279AD), in which the practical employment of reason resulted in commercial and technological advances and increases in population and living standards.⁸ A lesson emerges from the evidence: those who esteem their minds tend to keep them longest, and a society characterized by esteem for the mind tends to be conducive to the welfare of its members.

Purpose as a Cardinal Value

The value of purpose seems paradoxical. A value by nature is something we seek, i.e., a purpose; and to seek purpose is to value it. The concepts of purpose and value, as we noted in Chapter 2, identify the same fundamental phenomenon from different perspectives. Is it not a category error to make purpose itself a *value*? Is the value of purpose then an instance of itself?

The solution to this paradox lies in the diagram. We do not pursue our values automatically, as other species of animals do, through impulses that operate without volition. We must consciously select our goals and initiate from within, by an exercise of will, the effort to pursue them. Many people dread this responsibility. To value purpose is to welcome it. Over and above our particular goals in life, we need to value the having of goals and the deliberate pursuit of them.

In her discussions of the cardinal values, Ayn Rand often related the value of purpose directly to her principle that “productive work is the central purpose of a rational man’s life...”⁹ To establish the significance of this principle we will need to flesh out the logical structure of our values and virtues in more detail, so in this book we will address this aspect of purposeful action in Chapter 5, when we discuss the virtue of productiveness, and again in the Conclusion, when we sum up the overall significance of the philosophy. However, as diagram 4.1 shows, the value of purpose is required for the pursuit of *any* concrete value.

Given the knowledge we have developed so far of the nature of human action, we can see that purpose as a value has the following key elements:

- The commitment to act for our values in reality. Deliberate action begins

with an intention to pursue something we value. An intention is an idea, a projection within our own minds of what it is that we seek to obtain. . To value purpose is to esteem the process of acting on our ideas, carrying through on our intentions, achieving our goals for real, rather than letting an intention remain in the mind as an unrealized wish. This aspect of purpose as a cardinal value is expressed in *Atlas Shrugged* by Dagny Taggart’s reflection, “First, the vision—the physical shape to express it. First, the thought—then the purposeful motion down the straight line of a single track to a chosen goal. Wasn’t it evil to wish without moving—or to move without aim?” (230)

- The constant, ongoing commitment to acting on purpose, to knowing what one is doing. Acting without any goal in mind is the flip side of desiring a goal without acting for it. To value purpose is to reject arbitrary, aimless action (“moving without aim”), but its primary worth is as a positive appreciation of the meaning of one’s actions. Ayn Rand idealized this attitude toward life in her depiction of Francisco D’Anconia as a teenager, in *Atlas Shrugged*:

“He flew through the days of his summer month like a rocket, but if one had stopped him mid-flight, he could always name the purpose of his every random movement. Two things were impossible to him: to stand still or to move aimlessly.”¹⁰

- The commitment to orchestrating our purposes in the service of our lives. The goals we seek from moment to moment are not discrete and independent ends. They serve our larger, longer-term ends in a complex hierarchy of values. So the control of action by purpose also means appreciating the ultimate ends implicit in subordinate ones. It means cultivating a sense of priorities so that one knows clearly why the things one is doing now are more important than the things one might have been doing otherwise. Our concrete values—work, hobbies, dining options, recreational activities, social interactions, and so on—make competing claims on our time, effort, and other resources. To resolve these conflicts, we must make deliberate decisions about the relative importance of these values in reference to our basic purposes.

- As an orientation toward the world, finally, valuing purpose means valuing achievement and the creation of value. We have seen how important the production of values is to human life. Valuing purpose implies valuing the phenomenon of creation *per se*, valuing discovery, invention, production, improvement, getting things done, and making a difference in the world. It’s the orientation of a valuer, an entrepreneur of life.

Thus it is no paradox to say that, in light of our capacities for reason and will, it is a value to human beings to have values. It is not enough that something objectively meets one of our needs. We will not act for it unless and until we consciously value it. For example, a career can be an important value,

for reasons that we will explore later in the chapter. But a person is not born pursuing a career. In searching for a particular career to adopt as one of his important purposes in life, he is motivated by the purpose of having such a purpose.¹¹

Our basic purposes are what give us a sense of meaning in life, and there is abundant inductive evidence that having a sense of meaning is a spiritual need. We can observe the numerous people who live aimlessly, without direction or conviction in their activities. These are people whose lives are filled with regrets and dreams left unfulfilled. Indeed, most of us have introspective evidence of how easy it is to drift along without an overall sense of purpose, and of how unsatisfying it is to live that way. The depth of this need for a sense of purpose is illustrated by the perennial concern about the meaning of life, both in popular self-help literature and in the work of great philosophers and artists.¹² The psychological study of depressed people is another source of evidence for this point. One important symptom of depression is mental listlessness, a lack of engagement with one's values and life—and a loss of desire to have or pursue any values in the first place, with the result that one's life seems utterly without meaning.¹³ This condition is so painful that seriously depressed people are at risk for suicide.

The need for conscious attention to the hierarchy of our purposes can be seen most clearly in social contexts. Prioritization is usually something that occurs within one's mind, but the need to prioritize comes out into the open in any large organization, in which people must work together to achieve common ends. Business firms, which are customarily committed to profit as their fundamental goal, provide us with evidence of the need to prioritize in their explicit expressions of purpose, such as "mission statements." In addition, there is often tension between different groups in a firm (management, workers, and owners, for instance) over whether it is properly oriented toward its purposes.¹⁴ Historically, we can observe cultures characterized by an esteem for progress, purposefulness, and creative endeavor, and these cultures tend to also be characterized by improvements in human welfare. For example, these attitudes toward achievement were common in the West during the industrial revolution of the 19th century, and in rapidly developing East Asia during the second half of the 20th century.¹⁵

Self as a Cardinal Value

Ayn Rand called the final cardinal value "Self-Esteem." We have called it the value of Self. This change in terminology reflects a small but significant change in our conception of the nature of this value. To value oneself is, of course, to esteem oneself. But self-esteem as conceived in the Objectivist literature is a narrower concept; it is only one element in the cardinal value of self.

The reasons for this change are both philosophical and psychological. They will become clear as we proceed, but the essential reason is this:

In her formulation of the cardinal values, Rand described self-esteem as “the inviolate certainty that [one’s] mind is competent to think and [one’s] person is worthy of happiness, which means: is worthy of life.” These two elements, self-confidence and self-worth, are indeed crucial elements in valuing oneself. But they have to be acquired. They have to be earned. In particular, at least in Rand’s conception, self-worth is essentially a *moral* appraisal of oneself, based on the character one has acquired through a consistent practice of acting on principle. In our view, this aspect of valuing oneself is neither broad enough nor fundamental enough to be considered a cardinal value. Why should we seek to acquire character? What motivates the effort to achieve this value? If life is our ultimate value, why do we need to prove ourselves worthy of life? And what about aspects of ourselves other than competence and character, attributes such as temperament, personality, interests? Are these aspects of our identity not to be valued?

There must, it seems, be a more fundamental commitment to oneself, a commitment that explains the need for self-esteem as a specific spiritual value and motivates us to achieve it. On our analysis, this commitment is to oneself as the *beneficiary* of all the actions one takes in pursuing one’s life. If the root of the cardinal value of purpose is an esteem for and commitment to *my life* as an ultimate end, the root of the cardinal value of self is an esteem for and commitment to *my* life, to myself as an ultimate beneficiary of my actions. The concept of value, Rand noted, presupposes an answer to the questions, “Of value to whom? and for what?” The point of the first question is that there are no intrinsic values, i.e., no things that are valuable in themselves apart from the benefit they confer on a valuer. As volitional beings who must seek these benefits for ourselves by deliberate, self-motivated action, we need to act from a profound esteem for ourselves as beneficiaries.

The core elements of this esteem include:

- A commitment to one’s happiness. We saw in Chapter 2 that happiness is the response to the achievement of values. Because it is a response—and specifically an emotional response—it cannot serve as the basic standard of value. It cannot tell us how to identify or pursue a consistent hierarchy of purposes. As a response to achieving values, however, happiness is the reward we enjoy for our achievements, for success in living our lives. It is the reward we enjoy as beneficiaries of our goal-directed actions. In this respect, to value oneself is to value one’s happiness as an end in itself; to seek happiness without compromise, sacrifice, apology, or guilt; and not to give up on the quest for happiness in the face of problems, losses, and disappointments.
- Valuing ourselves as unique individuals. Valuing ourselves as beneficiaries of our own goal-directed actions means valuing the *whole* self—not merely

the abstract notion of oneself as beneficiary, but the particular, individual person one really is. Though Objectivists have not yet produced any systematic theory of selfhood and personal identity, it is clear that each individual has a unique constellation of attributes, including his skills, knowledge-base, memories, aspirations in life, interests, personality, style of thinking and acting, and character, as well as his physical appearance and capacities. Without an acceptance and appreciation of one's individual identity, the commitment to act on one's own behalf would obviously be undermined. Happiness, moreover, is not an automatic, mechanical result of achieving one's goals in the external world. It requires that we stop to "smell the roses," to take conscious satisfaction in the things we have achieved and to appreciate their personal significance for us. In other words, both the motivation to initiate action, and the capacity to enjoy the results, presuppose an appreciation of our identity.

- A commitment to growth. By contrast with other animals, human beings are capable of substantial continuing growth and spiritual development even after they have reached adulthood. We have already discussed the fact that reason allows us to expand our knowledge in a continuous, open-ended manner. The same is true for other aspects of the self. There is no set limit on the continuing development of our skills, our capacity to enjoy life, and our character; and as we develop these traits we increase our prospects for happiness and success in life. But, as with all other values, we must deliberately exert the effort to pursue self-development. Man, as Rand often said, is "a being of self-made soul." Self-esteem as she defined it—the conviction that one is both competent and worthy to live—is the crowning achievement of this investment in oneself.

It is this thoroughgoing appreciation of the value of oneself that the ethical doctrine of altruism seeks to ignore. Many are the moralities that place responsibility and blame upon the individual—especially the productive, capable individual—and yet deny him the benefit of his own actions. He will *produce* the goods, and others—the tribe, the state, the needy, the primitive, the aristocrats, all of society—will *enjoy* them. This sunders responsibility from worth. Altruism is often presented in the guise of benevolence and generosity, through a narrow equation of self-interest with a kind of ethical solipsism. But this presents a harmful ideology under the cloak of social values that, as we shall see, do not depend on it. A person who values himself will hold himself consistently as the ultimate beneficiary of his actions, and not allow the value of his life to become obscured in the complexity of his engagement with society.

It is natural that we can find ample direct, empirical evidence that that appreciation of oneself, as beneficiary of one's actions, is a key value for human survival. As we've seen in examining other values, history is a vast record of the experiences people have had holding various kinds of values. Cultures that explicitly deprecated the value of self have been quite common, from the Ancient

Spartans to 20th Century Communists. The ethics of self-sacrifice have caused numerous conflicts and inflicted vast amounts of human suffering, culminating this century in the great totalitarian genocides committed by German Fascists, and Russian, Chinese and Cambodian Communists.¹⁶ Notice that social movements such as fascism can at once be evidence of the effects of the rejection of reason and of the embrace of altruism; the intellectual causes of historical events are often multi-fold, to say nothing of the non-intellectual causes.

We all have plenty of relevant experience of our own, both from introspection and from observing the behavior of others. You can probably notice that people who feel unworthy or chronically guilty are under-motivated and that they have unhappy social lives. Women have commonly experienced deprecation based solely on their sex, and many have limited themselves because they have accepted a negative assessment of themselves. While pride is widely condemned, genuine confidence in oneself is probably rarer than is egotism.

Furthermore, this has been a substantial field of study for psychologists, for instance in the ever-growing literature on the importance of self-esteem in daily life. This research shows that enriching one's appreciation for oneself is integral to leading a successful and happy life, and that people of low self-esteem are vulnerable to such maladies as chronic anxiety and often lack the inner strength to respond to negative, external shocks in a robust manner.¹⁷

Cardinal Values: Conclusion

The cardinal values orient the rest of our values, and motivate us in our pursuit of our lives and happiness. In this role they constitute a constant reaffirmation of the choice to live. But of course, as appreciations of and commitments to our most essential capacities, they are naturally still rather abstract. This may seem to give them the flavor of the optional.

After all, one could easily go through life at half-throttle, with a "sort-of" commitment to oneself, if it's not too hard, and a "sort-of" commitment to one's happiness, putting up with not feeling especially happy so long as life is not too stressful. One could be satisfied with "kind of" having cognitive control, accepting the fact that most of the world is a fog as long as one can get along all right in one's immediate surroundings. But the result would be a life half-lived, both in the literal sense of having a reduced chance of survival, and in the figurative sense of a passionless, meaningless, empty life.

One way to see the importance of the cardinal values is to imagine an exercise you might go through at the end of each day. As you are lying back in bed, reflect on the day just past: "There is a finite number of days in my life, and this one is gone. How did I spend it? Did I have a purpose to what I did? Or was I just drifting through this day, letting whatever happened happen? Given my purposes, did I adopt the best, most rational means to them, or was I acting in a

confused, self-defeating manner? Did I act for myself? Was it *my* interests and happiness that was driving me today, or was it what I thought others wanted?”

If your answers to these musing questions don't amount to the reaffirmation of your cardinal values, then you probably had a frustrating, unsatisfying, misdirected day; the sort of day you would like to live over again, but can't. Staying committed to Reason, Purpose, and Yourself as cardinal values keeps you on track for making every day an effective and fulfilling one.

Other Spiritual Values

The word “cardinal” normally means primary or first in order. The cardinal values are *not* first in the order of deriving the moral code of Objectivism. That status belongs to production, which provides for the material needs essential for our survival. Reason is next in order, as the means of production and thus our basic tool of survival. But man's rational faculty is a highly complex capacity, with its own needs that must be satisfied if it is to be exercised and relied upon to its fullest extent. These needs give rise to the realm of spiritual values. It is within this realm that reason, purpose, and self-esteem are cardinal values. Because reason is volitional and self-conscious, we need three over-arching commitments: to reason itself as a method of knowing and acting, to purpose as the end that governs our actions, and to ourselves as the beneficiaries of our actions. They are primary in the sense that they can and should be pursued in every use of the mind in every deliberate action, playing a role analogous to the axioms in cognition. These values are also first in the order of derivation within the spiritual realm, and we can now go on to show how other spiritual values can be derived from them (in conjunction with direct inductive evidence).

To illustrate the pattern of derivation, let us begin with two simple cases, education and career, whose relation to the cardinal values is too obvious to require diagrams. We will then move on to several further spiritual and social values whose derivation follows the pattern in a more complex way. These include philosophy, art, and visibility.

Education

Education is the process of acquiring knowledge from others in a systematic way. Education includes both the learning of methods through training and practice and the systematic study of established bodies of substantive knowledge. It may involve actual instruction by teachers or a self-directed course of reading and study. As a process of acquiring knowledge, education differs from first-hand discoveries by observation and experimentation because it is a process of learning things that others have already discovered. And, because it is systematic, education must be distinguished from casual reading, conversation,

and other non-systematic ways of learning things from others.

Why is education an important value? Specific elements of an education relate directly to specific goals such as production. But the general value of education as such relates to the cardinal value of reason. To value reason, as we saw, is to value the integrated, self-directed, open-ended acquisition of knowledge. Thus, to value reason is to value the acquisition of conceptual knowledge as such, by any means. But why does this require that we value education, as a specific means of acquiring knowledge? To answer this question, let's look at the two distinguishing features of education.

1) Why do we need to acquire knowledge from others? Any complex body of knowledge, such as that which we rely on in modern life, includes a vast number of sophisticated integrations and inferences, which it took many other minds working over thousands of years to create or discover. It would be impossible for a person, starting as an infant, to discover for himself on his own and over a lifetime the basic knowledge which the average high-school student learns today. Education is only way to acquire knowledge on this scale.¹⁸ The cardinal value of reason, therefore, together with the inductive observation about the vast amount of already-established knowledge, implies that education is itself an important value.

2) As for the other element in our definition—the *systematic* aspect of education—the fundamental explanation is that knowledge is hierarchical. This means that some items of knowledge presuppose others: one has to discover or learn things in their proper order.¹⁹ One can't simply pick up knowledge willy-nilly. This is true of knowledge as such, at any level, in any degree. But the need for systematic procedures increases exponentially as the body of knowledge to be acquired becomes larger, more abstract, and more complexly interrelated. Given the magnitude of the knowledge we need today, as described in the preceding paragraph, the hierarchical nature of knowledge requires a highly systematized sequence. To appreciate this point—and to confirm it inductively—consider just the two major features of a systematic education: the division of knowledge into subjects like mathematics, geology, and history; and the gradations within any subject from introductory to advanced. Could you have learned what you know today if the material you had to learn had not been classified into subject areas? Imagine listening day after day, year after year, to a stream of information from mathematics, history, English literature, chemistry, philosophy, economics, art history, etc., all intermixed in random order. As for the progression within subjects, from introductory to advanced, imagine trying to learn calculus before arithmetic. Imagine trying to write a doctoral thesis on the depression of 1893 without any background in economics or American history.

It is obvious that education is the only means of acquiring anything like the literate, numerate, theoretical, and factually rich body of knowledge available today to anyone who values reason.

Career

Most people conceive of their lives as divided into specific areas such as work, family, friends, romantic relationships, health and self-improvement, leisure, and the like. People differ, of course, in the way they make these distinctions, but the tendency to distinguish is common—and reasonable. Areas of life are defined and distinguished from each other by the specific goals, relationships, and kinds of activity involved. The Objectivist ethics as presented in this book is concerned with principles that apply universally to all of life, but a full development of the ethics would show how the principles apply in particular ways to particular areas. This would be a complex task, because the specific values we pursue in a given area typically relate to more than one of the broad universal values at the base of the ethics. Career is a good example of this pattern, and we discuss it here because among the fundamental values it serves are the cardinal values of purpose and self.

A career is the systematic pursuit of productive achievement, on a rising scale, in a particular line of work. Having a career is a long-term project. It means working through a series of related jobs or posts, increasing one's capacity to create value through the acquisition of knowledge, skill, and experience. Of course, having a career needn't mean climbing the corporate ladder, or pursuing readily marketable skills: that is a question of personal preferences and circumstances. But whatever one's career values are, one needs to systematically pursue the improvement in one's ability to achieve them, because doing so contributes to the following more fundamental values:

A career is a means to the end of production, since concentrating on a specialty in work improves one's productivity over time. Of course, work of any kind is productive as long as it creates value, even if it does not involve a deliberate, systematic, long-term pursuit of rising achievement. Indeed, for most of history, most humans engaged in largely repetitive, cyclical work such as farming that involved little if any gain in productivity or wealth over an individual's lifetime. But as we saw in discussing production, our need for wealth is open-ended, so the additional gain in productivity that comes from careers obviously serves this need.

But the subject of this chapter is our spiritual ends. How does a career serve these ends? To begin with, it serves the cardinal value of purpose. A career organizes one's specific, day-to-day purposes around the deliberate, systematic, long-term purpose of improving one's means of survival. A person who drifts from job to job, concerned only with paying the bills, may have a purpose for each of the particular things he does. The same is true of the person who works from a sense of duty, concerned only with keeping his otherwise idle hands busy. But neither of these people has an overarching goal that unites their work activities over the course of a lifetime. A career gives us a hierarchy of

values in our working lives, and thus a more purposive means of choosing among opportunities than is available to someone not pursuing a career. At each point in time, each stage along the way, a person with a career is concerned not only with the requirements of the job at hand but with its potential for giving him the new knowledge, skills, and opportunities he seeks in order to expand the scope of his productive achievement in the future. Valuing one's career is thus an important way of valuing purpose, paying attention to one's purposes and making sure one's activities achieve their ends.

Developing one's career is also a means to the end of self-esteem. We saw that one of the elements in self-esteem is a confidence in one's fundamental competence to live. Self-supporting work of any kind helps one achieve this confidence through the activity of meeting one's basic material needs (a phenomenon to which we will return in Chapter 5 when we discuss productive work in more detail). Young people frequently experience this spiritual aspect of work with particular intensity when they take their first job, receive their first pay-check, and know that they have achieved a new level of self-reliance. The same aspect of valuing the self is served more fully when one organizes one's working life around a career, which provides continual satisfactions of meeting new challenges, relying on one's own thought and judgment in ever more complex ways, and achieving an increasing measure of control over one's fate. A second important way in which a career serves the value of self follows from the fact that careers are chosen. To make a choice about the kind of work one will pursue over the long term, one must consider one's own needs, interests, abilities, and tastes. One must look for a fit between the objective requirements of the work and the highly personal traits that determine whether one will be find fulfillment in meeting those requirements. In other words, one is not only the agent and purposive initiator of a career but its beneficiary as well, spiritually no less than financially.

Thus a career is an area of life that offers many opportunities to gain important, fundamental values. This is why it deserves a high place in one's personal hierarchy of values.

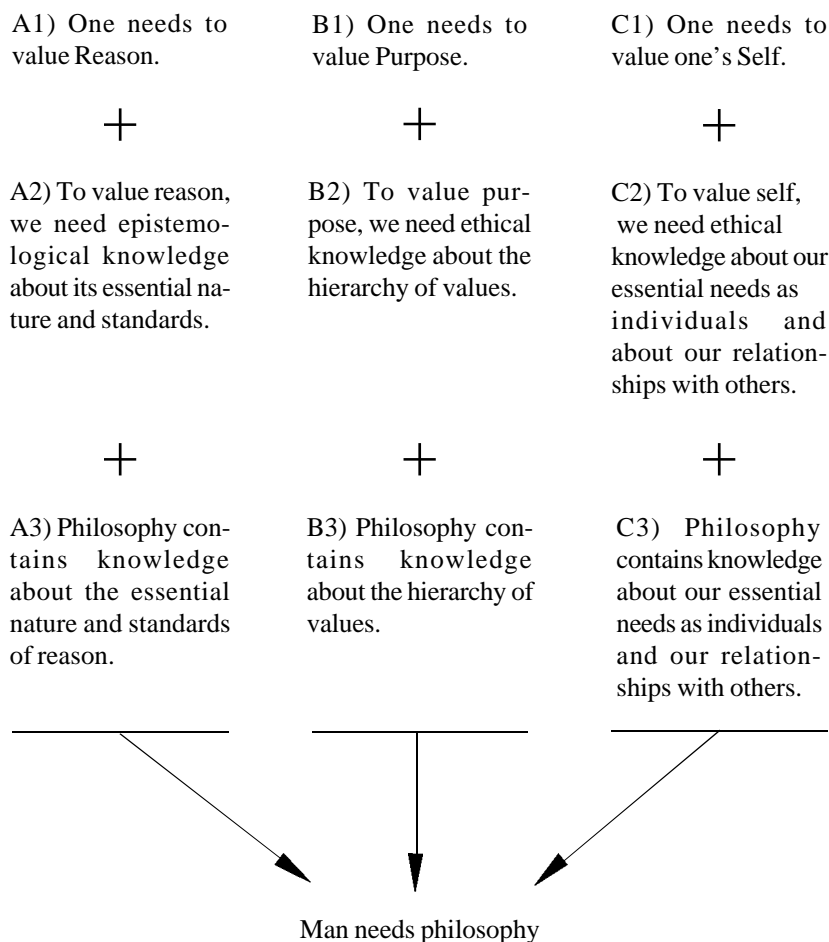
This brief discussion of education and careers illustrates, in a relatively simple form, how the cardinal values underlie other, more specific spiritual and social values. With this understanding, we can now turn to several other cases in which the derivation is more complex and less obvious. Indeed, for each of these further values—philosophy, art, and visibility—Objectivism has an original explanation of *why* they are valuable.

Philosophy as a value

This book is devoted to laying out the rationale behind a comprehensive world-view and ethical system, in other words, a philosophy. So far we

have taken it for granted that philosophy is a valuable body of knowledge. This is natural, since the foundational information in metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics that we need in order to show the value of philosophy is itself part of philosophy. Now we have developed enough background to make this value explicit. That background includes the discussions of the cardinal values, of knowledge in chapter 1, and of principles in chapter 3.

Diagram 4.2: Cardinal Values and Philosophy



Diagrams 4.2 and 4.3 present two distinct rationales for philosophy as a spiritual value. Recall that, in Chapter 3, we saw that principles were valuable in virtue of two facts: that they allow us to grasp large amounts of knowledge in a compact form, i.e., they provide *unit-economy*; and that they allow us to insure that our knowledge is *consistent*. Because philosophy is a body of principles—principles of ethics, principles of metaphysics, etc.—it partakes of the dual function of principles. On the one hand, philosophy is a body of specific knowledge about the formation of knowledge, rules of inference, the nature of values, and so on. The theme of Diagram 4.2 is the value of that knowledge in itself. In addition, philosophy is an overarching world-view that subsumes and integrates all our specialized knowledge. The value of philosophy as an integrator is the theme of Diagram 4.3. Let's take these two themes in order.

Premises A1, B1, and C1 of Diagram 4.2 remind us of our need to pursue the cardinal values. The argument proceeds as three distinct, though similar, chains of reasoning. Each chain of argument in the diagram—A, B, and C—shows how the fields of philosophy serve as means to each of the cardinal values, respectively.

The premises labeled “A” show how philosophy serves the value of reason. **Premise A1** states that **one needs to value Reason**. **Premise A2** points out that **to value reason, we need epistemological knowledge about its essential nature and standards**. As we have seen, epistemology teaches us what our means of knowing are. It is the branch of philosophy concerned with the nature, acquisition, and validation of knowledge. Among other things, it studies the methods and standards of definition and logic, without which even moderately sophisticated reasoning is impossible. Direct evidence of premise A2 is all around us, not only in the thinking methods we use every day, but in the errors of knowledge that come from a failure to embrace the right epistemological standards and methods. We can see this quite regularly in fields such as politics and journalism, where many people fail to employ basic standards of reasoning, as is evidenced by the widespread use of fallacious argument forms. The appeal to majority is quite common, for example, in the way polls of popular opinion are cited in the popular media, and confusion between statistical correlation and causation is rife in popular discussions of health and environmental risks.

History provides additional inductive evidence that the nature and methods of knowledge are not obvious, and that they require the acquisition of epistemological knowledge. In the West, as far as we know, it was not until the ancient Greek civilization that humans first grasped the concept of proof by rational demonstration. And it was not until the scientific revolution of the 16th and 17th centuries that methods of induction by experiment were discovered. Before that era, the prevalence of faith and authority as means of knowledge was partly due to simple ignorance.

Premise A3 adds the point that **philosophy contains knowledge about the essential nature and standards of reason.** In other words, epistemology is part of philosophy. So philosophy fulfills our need for epistemological knowledge. Together, premises A1, A2 and A3 lead us to **conclude** that philosophy is a value, i.e. that **man needs philosophy.**

Now let's trace out chain B. **Premise B1** is that **one needs to value Purpose.** **Premise B2** adds that **to value purpose, we need ethical knowledge about the hierarchy of values.** To pursue our purposes, it is obvious that we must know what to pursue. As we saw in discussing purpose as a cardinal value, we need a commitment to our own lives as ultimate goals in order to motivate the pursuit of any lesser goals. It is ethics that tells us that life and happiness are ultimate values. To choose how to apportion our time and effort, moreover, we need a clear hierarchy of values. The hierarchy rests on fundamental values of the sort covered in this chapter and the previous one, and these values, too, are established by ethics.

Premise B3 states that **Philosophy contains knowledge about the hierarchy of values.** In other words, ethics is also a branch of philosophy. Together, premises B1, B2 and B3 make it clear that philosophy is a value, in this case because it teaches us about values.

The line of argument labeled C follows a similar pattern, focusing on the ways that philosophy serves the cardinal value of Self. **Premise C1** is: **one needs to value one's Self.** **Premise C2** elaborates on the implications of this fact: **to value self, we need ethical knowledge about our essential needs as individuals and about our relationships with others.** In discussing self as a cardinal value, for example, we saw that a sense of one's competence and worth is a crucial need. We also saw that valuing the self is incompatible with altruistic self-sacrifice. These claims are validated by ethics. Over all, ethics tells us about the values that go into the good life, the flourishing life, that we should seek for ourselves. It also tells us how other people can help or hinder that aim. **Premise C3** concludes the point by noting that **philosophy contains knowledge about our essential needs as individuals and our relationships with others** i.e., that ethics is included in philosophy. Together, premises C1, C2 and C3 entail the **conclusion** that **man needs philosophy.**

Philosophy is the most general of the sciences. It is a body of knowledge about how the world works and how man relates to it. Each of the three arguments in Diagram 4.2 traces the way an aspect of philosophy applies to one of the three broadest values man can pursue. In a sense, this shows the value of philosophy as a *specialized* body of knowledge. As Ayn Rand put it in summary fashion:

In order to live, man must act; in order to act, he must make choices; in order to make choices, he must define a code of values; in order to

define a code of values, he must know what he is and where he is—i.e., he must know his own nature (including his means of knowledge) and the nature of the universe in which he acts—i.e., he needs metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, which means: *philosophy*.²⁰

But there is another, independent reason for the importance of philosophy. The argument represented in Diagram 4.3 shows why the *universal* nature of philosophical knowledge is also a value.

Philosophy integrates the knowledge of the sciences and summarizes the broad universals that provide their foundation. Philosophy is one’s way of grasping the answers to questions about the overall nature of the world and the meaning of life. Of course, in a sense we can *see* the world, and *feel* what life is like. But this perceptual awareness is limited to the particulars of the moment: what we actually see is *this* desk, *these* trees, *those* children, and so on. We cannot hold in mind, as a perceptual integration, how all the things we have ever been aware of fit together, and of course we cannot have a perceptual awareness of things we have never directly encountered.

Ayn Rand noted that everyone forms some kind of integration that provides an overall assessment of the world, at least at the subconscious level. She called this integration one’s “sense of life.”²¹ Philosophy brings this assessment out in the open, in a conceptual form that we can consciously consider and understand. It takes a welter of feelings, observations, and assumptions about the way things add up and transforms them into an explicit view of the world. Once it is explicit, we can determine whether it is accurate, or if it needs to be changed.

Philosophy is distinctively valuable because it allows us to see how all our knowledge comes together. It allows us to see whether conclusions we have formed in disparate areas of life and study can be squared with each other. Once again, Rand states the point forcefully:

If it should be asked...: Who, then, is to keep order in the organization of man’s conceptual vocabulary, suggest the changes or expansions of definitions, formulate the principles of cognition and the criteria of science, protect the objectivity of methods and of communications within and among the special sciences, and provide the guidelines for the integration of man’s knowledge?—the answer is: philosophy.²²

We saw in Chapter 3 that principles are the means by which we ensure the consistency of our knowledge of an area or domain. Most principles apply to a fairly restricted context, and given the differences between those contexts, we can form principles that seem entirely distinct. Integrating our ideas is a

valuable activity because it helps us check the validity of conclusions, particularly highly abstract conclusions which can more easily conceal subtle errors than can more concrete judgments.

A scientist, for example, may base his knowledge of the physical world on his work in the laboratory, while learning about values and human relations in a church. His method in the laboratory involves mathematical precision, careful experimentation, and painstaking measurement, whereas life in society involves vague language, haphazard interaction, and intuition, so it might seem natural to him that the moral laws of the church, which apply to life in society, are not subject to the same rigorous evaluation as the laws of physics and chemistry, which apply to experiments in the lab. He might therefore take no umbrage at his church's emphasis on faith in addressing spiritual and moral issues. Yet his failure to integrate these disparate fields means that he allows contradictions, and therefore falsehoods, in his thinking.

In diagram 3.5, we inferred that, because contradictions are impossible, and because reason is fallible, **conceptual knowledge within a domain must be made consistent with other knowledge within that domain.** Here, this is **Premise 1** of diagram 4.3.

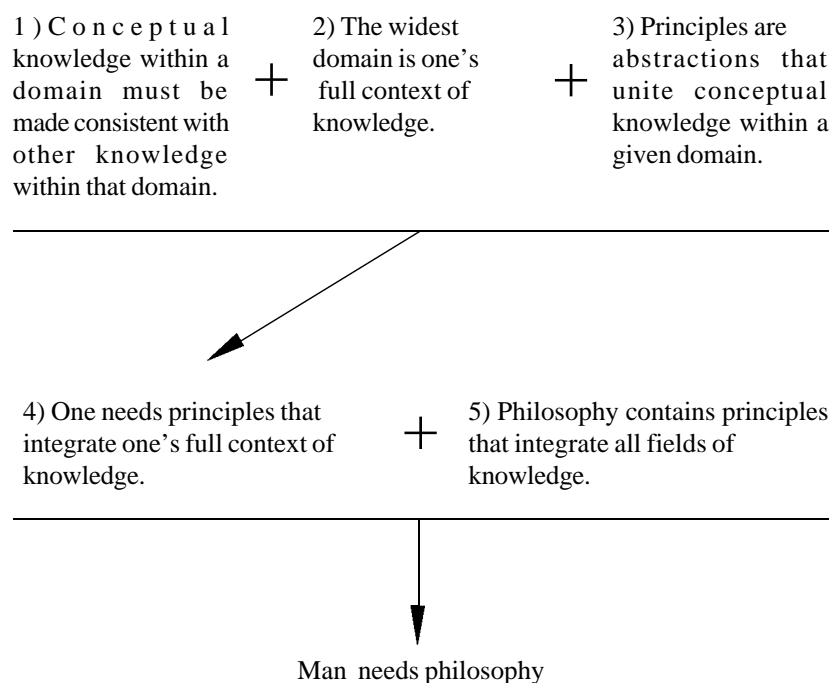
Premise 2 expresses the straightforward fact that **the widest domain is one's full context of knowledge.** For an individual, the full context includes everything he knows, in every subject and every area of life, along with the totality of lifetime experience that is available to him as a basis for his conclusions. For a society or civilization, the full context includes everything that has been established as true in every branch of inquiry. **Premise 3** restates premise 2 of diagram 3.5 : **principles are abstractions that integrate conceptual knowledge within a given domain.**

Together, premises 1,2, and 3 give us grounds to **conclude** that **one needs principles that integrate one's full context of knowledge.** This is **Premise 4**, and it simply applies the conclusion of diagram 3.5 —one needs principles that integrate one's knowledge within a domain— to the widest of domains. This is where philosophy comes in. Premise 5 reminds us that **philosophy contains principles that integrate all fields of knowledge.** In other words, it is through the widest integrations of our experience that we come to see how our knowledge from biology, physics, economics, psychology, logic, anthropology, history, chemistry, art, and literature all fits together. Philosophical principles concern human beings and reality in general, and thus apply to the subject matter of all these specific domains of knowledge. That is why they can integrate knowledge across these narrower domains and identify contradictions. This is true not only of substantive principles, such as the principle that man has free will, but of principles of method. An understanding of the absolutism of reason, for example, would resolve the contradiction in the scientist's mind between his approach to scientific issues and his approach to issues of

living in society.

When we have validated a philosophical abstraction, moreover, it gives us a gauge to test the validity of new ideas. Of course, unless the abstraction in question is a philosophical axiom, the fact that a new idea clashes with it does not necessarily invalidate the new idea, but it shows that one of the two must be mistaken in some respect. This is how Premises 3, 4 and 5 come together to imply **conclusion** of Diagram 4.3: **Man needs philosophy.**

Diagram 4.3: Context and Philosophy



Having stressed the importance of checking for consistency among our conclusions, we need to be clear about the limitations of this principle. Some philosophers have held that relationships of consistency and mutual support among our beliefs are sufficient to validate those beliefs as true, a viewpoint known as the coherence theory of truth or knowledge. This is *not* the Objectivist position. Knowledge is objective conceptual awareness of *reality*,

so its correspondence to the facts of reality is its *primary* characteristic. The first question we should ask about any idea or claim is: “What are the facts of reality to which it corresponds? Does it or does it not identify an objective fact?” The truth of our conclusions is determined by their relationship to our perceptual awareness of things in the world, as integrated by reason, not by their internal relationships to other items in the context of our knowledge. Internal consistency is simply not sufficient to validate knowledge. Even if one discovered no contradiction among one’s thoughts, it is not a guarantee that one has ascertained the truth: one might simply be blind to the facts, and universally, though consistently, wrong.

Nor is internal consistency *necessary* for validation. Truth is not a characteristic of one’s entire knowledge, but rather of one’s propositions and theories. If one discovers a contradiction in one’s thoughts, it shows that *some* thought must be false, not that all one’s thoughts are false. If one has reached a conclusion by valid reasoning, from a body of evidence sufficient to prove it true, then it represents genuine knowledge, even if it conflicts with some other conclusion (though of course the latter conclusion cannot also be true.) The knowledge of a given fact, if acquired by objective, rational means, cannot be held hostage to errors we may have made elsewhere in our thinking.

What is the point, then, of using principles, including philosophical principles, to make sure that our conclusions are consistent? The answer lies in the rationale for Premise 1 in the diagram (see diagram 3.5). Conceptual knowledge within a domain (including the full domain of our entire context of knowledge) must be made consistent because when we discover a contradiction among our conclusions, we know that at least one of them must be false. Because reason is fallible, it is rare that we know for sure, before investigating, which conclusion is at fault. Of course an idea that contradicts one of the axioms can be rejected right away. But most conclusions are based on integrative processes that are subject to many errors, as we discussed in Chapter 1 (see the discussion of diagram 1.5 in that chapter). This fallibility requires that we exercise objectivity by checking the evidence that supports a conclusion whenever we acquire reason to think that an error may have occurred. We normally have such a reason when we notice that that conclusion contradicts some other conclusion.

Consistency is thus an important diagnostic tool. It is not the primary means of validating our knowledge, but it is a useful *secondary* principle for checking one’s knowledge. This is especially true of complex knowledge and knowledge based on limited evidence. Consider how much of our knowledge is gained second-hand — from journalists, advocates, and historians, for instance. In cases where one can’t easily check the facts oneself, checking the coherence of a claim as it relates to one’s other knowledge is a useful way of weighing its validity. And it is especially important to check the coherence of one’s highest abstractions, as a way of finding errors that can creep in to those kind of ideas;

these ideas involve the longest chains of integration, and are thus especially vulnerable to error.

Now we have seen two distinct ways in which philosophy is a value. If you have found that you agree with this reasoning, you can now feel reassured that your choice to explore the logical structure of Objectivism is not a waste of your time. Indeed, contemplation of the vast empirical evidence that supports our conclusion may even convince you that you are engaged in a worthy endeavor of vital importance to your own life.

Art as a Value

Art²³ is widely thought of as indefinable, inherently subjective, and disconnected from any practical need or concern. Many modern thinkers say art is any form of expression, if one wants it to be. Traditional thinkers often connected art with the creation or expression of beauty, which they saw as an eternal, otherworldly verity, like Plato's forms. Ayn Rand rejected both these theories. In their place she offered a clearly defined conception of art, and argued that art was intimately connected with man's need to rely on reason in the service of his life in this world.²⁴

The intent of this section is not to survey the entire field of aesthetics. We are concerned with art as one of the spiritual values that the Objectivist ethics says we should seek in order to satisfy the needs of our rational capacity. But of course we must draw on aesthetics to identify the essential characteristics of art: that which explains its power and ubiquity. There are many other important issues in aesthetics with which we will not be concerned here: what beauty is, and what its role in art is, what the forms of art are, how to evaluate works of art, whether the popular conception of art is improperly broad or narrow, and so on.

What is art? A play, a painting, a novel, a song, a dance: what do these things all have in common? Each of them is a concrete, something we can perceive with our senses. Each of them is a man-made object, an expression of the artist's imagination, vision, and ideas. And each of them represents real or imaginary things, people, places, situations, and events.²⁵ (Of course, we are speaking of what might be called "high art," as opposed to artistic works of design, such as furniture or woven patterns.)

Ayn Rand held that a work of art embodies a viewpoint—a content or theme—about issues much broader than the specific concretes involved, issues such as man's nature and place in the world. This content is what the artwork represents at its deepest level, and it is what the artist is trying to convey in creating and shaping his material. Art thus "involves man's widest abstractions:" As examples of the issues that art is concerned with, Rand mentioned the following:

Is the universe intelligible to man, or unintelligible and unknowable? Can man find happiness on earth, or is he doomed to frustration and despair? Does man have the power of *choice*... or is he the helpless plaything of forces beyond his control, which determine his fate? Is man, by nature, to be valued as good, or to be despised as evil? These are *metaphysical* questions, but the answers determine the kind of *ethics* men will accept and practice...²⁶

She described the answers that an artist gives to these questions as “metaphysical value judgments,” and she characterized art accordingly as “the selective recreation of reality in accordance with the artist’s metaphysical value-judgments.”²⁷

What does it mean to “recreate” reality? In many cases, of course, art involves invented people, scenes, and events. But Rand’s term applies primarily to the abstract content of the artwork. The artist conveys a view of reality that is selective, a view of reality that highlights what the artist considers interesting, striking, important, essential, typical, or ideal. The artist represents the world, not as it is in every respect, as a journalist or historian would report it, but “as it might and ought to be.” Thus the artwork is a concrete embodiment of the artist’s philosophy, and the viewer or listener responds to it as such. If the philosophical ideas implicit in the work are congruent with our own, we tend to feel a sense of recognition and affirmation that we experience as profoundly meaningful. It is the portrayal of a world fundamentally re-envisioned that gives great art much of its power.

This power, according to Objectivism, reflects a need of man’s consciousness, a need that derives from man’s need for philosophy. The connection between these needs is laid out in Diagram 4.4.

Premise 1 reminds us that, as we showed earlier in the chapter, **man needs philosophy**. In this context, it is not philosophy’s epistemological but its moral role—its role in aiding the pursuit of purpose and self as cardinal values—that is essential. A philosophical understanding of the values that make for a full life, and of the principles we should follow to achieve such values (i.e., the virtues), is necessary if we are to choose our actions wisely. Philosophy, in other words, must guide our actions. But it can do so only if one experiences philosophical convictions not merely as ideas or notions but as facts. A person who sees a truck racing down a city street takes the presence of the truck and its power to harm him as facts, as immediate realities, and he automatically refrains from stepping into the street. But if a person is in the hazy transition between sleeping and waking, caught between a vivid dream and the emerging but still dim awareness of the quiet bedroom, he is not yet ready to act on any of

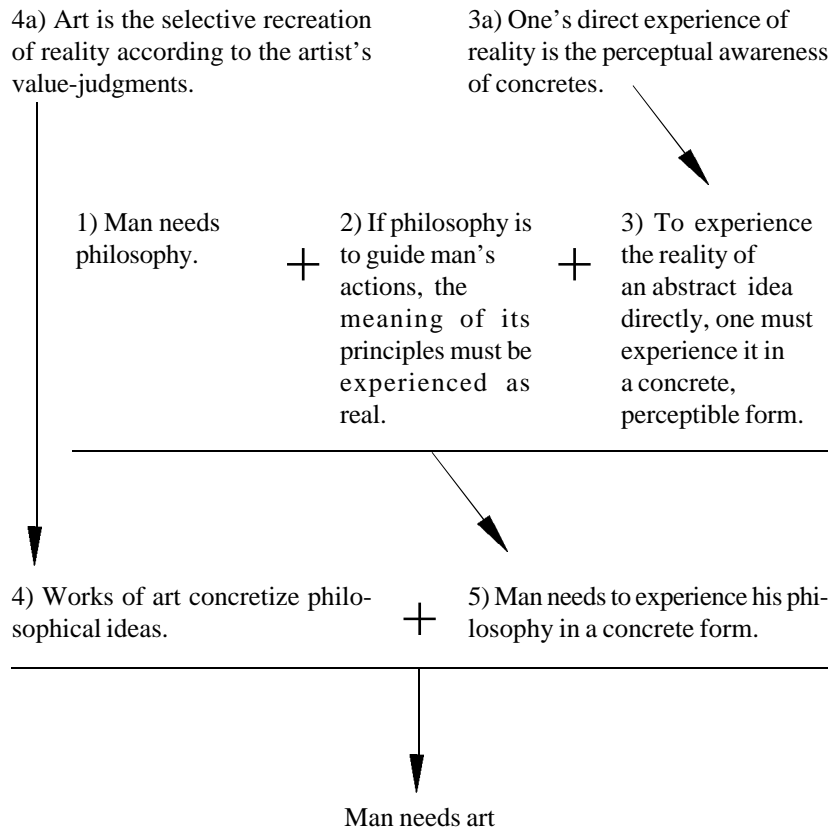
the confused contents of his awareness. In the same way, a person who grasps his own life as an ultimate value, who accepts the moral propriety of pursuing his own self-interest and understands that principle in the full context of his nature as a living being, is not likely to engage in self-sacrifice. But if he holds this moral principle as a vague or tentative hypothesis, a mere opinion as opposed to a fact, it will not have the same power to motivate. In other words, **if a philosophy is to guide man's actions, the meaning of its principles must be experienced as real.** This is **Premise 2** on the diagram.

But **one's fullest experience of reality is the perceptual awareness of concretes.** (**Premise 3a**) Our basic form of awareness is the sensory perception of concrete particulars. A philosophy is a system of abstract ideas. Abstractions as such do not exist out in the world. One does not encounter justice or injustice, for instance, except in the particulars which are instances of them, such as the proceedings in a court of law, or the character of a given individual. As abstractions, philosophical ideas embrace a wide range of particulars by omitting the details of their referents, while in perception we are aware of those details in all their complexity. By contrast with the wealth of information in a single visual scene, an abstraction can seem thin and unengaging. Of course we could in principle give a full conceptual description of anything we perceive. In the case of philosophy, we could in principle give an extensive conceptual description of what a good person would seek in life and the specific actions he would take to achieve it. But given the enormous number of issues involved, it would take volumes to do so, and the contents of those volumes could not be held in mind simultaneously. Because we have no richer or more direct awareness of the world, the experience of things via perception is what seems most real to us.

In the diagram, this inductive premise (3a) gives us grounds to infer **Premise 3: to fully experience the reality of an abstract idea, one must experience it in a concrete, perceptible form.** From the information summarized in premises 1,2 and 3, with the addition of the straightforward fact that a philosophy is an abstract idea, we can deductively infer **premise 5: Man needs to experience his philosophy in a concrete form.** As Ayn Rand expressed the argument,

An exhaustive philosophical treatise defining moral values, with a long list of virtues to be practiced, will not [communicate normative abstractions adequately]; it will not convey what an ideal man would be like and how he would act: no mind can deal with so immense a sum of abstractions.... There is no way to integrate such a sum without projecting an actual human figure—an integrated concretization that illuminates the theory and makes it intelligible.²⁸

Diagram 4.4: Art



Now we can see how art fits into human needs. Since the making of art involves the representation and embodiment of values, it is straightforward to conclude that **works of art concretize philosophical ideas**. This is **Premise 4**. In the most profound and distinctive art these ideas are, as Rand noted, fundamental judgments that capture important philosophical issues. In a novel, we can see these judgments in the essential nature of the characters, and the moral choices they make. A novelist in presenting a scene also performs in words the judgment that a painter or sculptor employs: in choosing to present a figure in a certain light, in choosing significant symbols, in highlighting some features and obscuring others, he communicates a sense of what is important, fascinating, worthy of regard. Even such stylized art forms as music and dance involve us-

ing the media of sound and motion to present an emotion-like sense of the world and of life.

Premises 4 and 5 together give us our **conclusion**: that **man needs art**.

Now let's consider what kind of direct, empirical evidence exists for our conclusion. We need to consider such evidence not only to confirm the conclusion but to complete the reasoning for it. The fact that we need to concretize our philosophical abstractions, together with the fact that art can perform this function, does not yet constitute a proof. There are, after all, other ways of concretizing ideas.

One can see ideas embodied in historical accounts, including biographies of great people. The stories of George Washington crossing the Delaware, and Winston Churchill during the Battle of Britain, are examples of courage that can inspire us in our own lives. Another way of concretizing ideas, one widely employed by religions, is ritual or ceremony. The act of burial, for examples, concretizes the fact that the deceased no longer exists in our world, and a gravestone serves as concrete reminder of a life that has passed.

What kind of inductive evidence is there that art is the best way, or at least an important way we can fulfill this need? We can introspect on the role of art in our own lives, and how much we feel we need it. Then there is anthropological evidence: art, and indeed all the traditional forms of art, including story-telling, poetry and song, music and dance, drawing and sculpture, exist in every human culture. And there is economic evidence, too: the amount of money people spend to acquire and experience art.

From this evidence, we can infer, given the conclusion of Diagram 4.4, that art is an extremely important value. Notice that we couldn't infer this without the argument in Diagram 4.4: the mere fact of art's ubiquity is not necessarily proof of its value. Mystical religions are ubiquitous as well, for example, and we would have to examine the nature of religion to understand why it is common (in fact, in its most useful aspects, it is a form of philosophy, and purports to make the world intelligible to people). But since we can show why art is needed, and observe that it is widely prized and produced, we have every grounds for esteeming it as a value.

Bear in mind that the argument in Diagram 4.4 does not summarize all the ways in which art is valuable. For instance, as the author Kay Nolte Smith pointed out, many forms of art give one the vicarious experience of living another life, in an aspect of existence such as a different time, place, career, sex, nationality, moral character, *etc.* This role of art can be very important in choosing one's purposes in life, by enlarging one's sense of human possibilities. Also, art that concretizes ideas one disagrees with can still be aesthetically pleasing; the experience of alien ideas as real can also give one insights into the way advocates of those ideas think of them. Art is also prized for aspects of design, including properties of elegance, symmetry and beauty. But art's great power

derives from its role as the concretizer of philosophy, and this is why we have focused on this aspect to the exclusion of other equally valid points.

Social Values

So far the values we have discussed are spiritual ones, which relate directly to the needs of reason. But of course we live in society and interact with others in the course of pursuing these values (as well as values in other categories). Objectivism is often inaccurately characterized as a philosophy of rugged individualism or ethical solipsism, partly because much of Rand's work, both fiction and nonfiction, was devoted to criticizing altruism as a moral doctrine. This critical aspect of Rand's writing lent it polemical power, especially in staking out room for individualism against the reflexive collectivism of her age. However, to reject altruism as a fundamental goal in ethics is not to deny the importance of society and social values, but rather to put them on their proper foundation. The purpose of this section is to show how Objectivism analyzes social values.

We pursue the values obtainable from others in myriad ways: going to the grocery store, taking a job, buying or selling a house, investing for retirement, playing cards, joining a health club, going to school, attending a concert, making friends, falling in love, raising a family, sharing the grief of a loved one's loss, contributing to charity, and on and on. Considered in the concrete, the values we seek through such activities are equally diverse, from the excitement of a new romance to the security of a retirement fund. In fundamental terms, however, Objectivism identifies three major values we can achieve through our social interactions. The first two of these are quite evident in the impersonal and public relationships we have with other members of society. These are *economic exchange* and *communication*. The third, which is more evident in the personal or intimate sphere, is *visibility*.²⁹ Note that these values are often pursued in combination rather than in isolation from each other. Certainly people who are intimate with each other, for example lovers, also engage in exchange and communication as part of their relationship, for instance. We distinguish these basic values for the sake of philosophical analysis.

Economic Exchange

Ayn Rand argued that, at the broadest level of abstraction, all proper human relationships amounted to some kind of trade.³⁰ Much of that "trading" is in fact implicit: here we are instead focusing on the explicit exchange of goods. Economic exchange is an integral part of everyday life. In modern life, as we saw when we discussed production, we get almost all our goods in the marketplace, and count our productivity in terms of money, which is of use only in exchange. We do our work as part of business firms, foundations, universi-

ties, bureaucracies, and other organizations based on the exchange and cooperation of labor.

The essential reason why economic exchange is a value is that specialization in the division of labor multiplies our productive capacity dramatically. Markets and firms are the means by which people institutionalize exchanges that the division of labor requires. This inductive point was well understood by such Enlightenment-era social philosophers as Bernard Mandeville and Adam Smith, and has provided the foundation for the modern field of economics.

Economic exchange serves the material value of production, fulfilling our material need for wealth. It also serves our spiritual needs, by allowing us to encourage the creation of works of art, for example, and by providing the arena in which we pursue our careers.

Communication

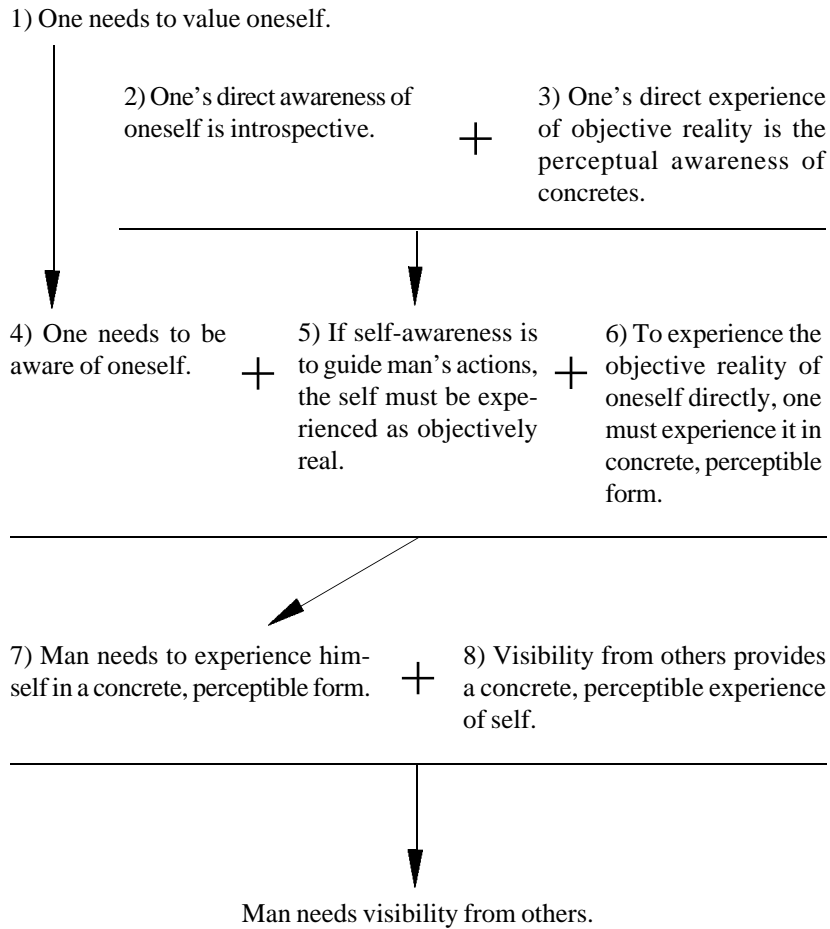
If we lived in isolation from each other, our knowledge and skills would be limited to what we could discover from the world and teach ourselves to do. Thanks to our ability to communicate, that is, to exchange ideas and knowledge with others, we are each able to partake of the fruits of the cognitive labors of generations. Communication is thus primarily a means to the value of knowledge, and because so much knowledge is available from others, as we saw in discussing education, communication is a very important value indeed. Communication also allows us to coordinate our activities explicitly, making possible complex productive activities and economic exchange. In addition, it is a vital ingredient of most other social values, such as friendship and love, for example.

The primary ingredient in such personal relationships as friendship and love, however, is visibility. While economic exchange and communication are obvious social values, and are widely recognized as such, the role of visibility in human life is much less obvious. Objectivism has a unique insight into why visibility is a value, and our main task in this section is to diagram the logic of its explanation.

Visibility

While exchange and communication are relatively impersonal ways of interacting, visibility is more personal and has deeper psychological roots. It is the essential characteristic that makes such personal values as friendship, love and companionship so powerful. The theory of visibility, outlined in Diagram 4.5, was primarily developed by Nathaniel Branden.³¹ In simple terms, visibility is the value of seeing oneself reflected in others. Let's see why this is a value.

Diagram 4.5: Visibility



Our starting points are some familiar observations. **Premise 1** expresses the cardinal value of Self: **One needs to value oneself**, a point we have already established.

In view of the plain fact that one cannot value something of which one is unaware, this premise implies that **one needs to be aware of oneself**. This is **Premise 4** in the diagram. Recall that valuing oneself means appreciating—and thus being aware of—one's full identity as a unique individual, including one's

particular personality, interests, style, character, convictions, and other attributes.

Self is a cardinal value because in order to act in support of our lives, over the whole course of our lives, we need to value ourselves as beneficiaries of those actions. A commitment to ourselves, and esteem for ourselves, is necessary to sustain the motivation for such actions and to enjoy the rewards. In regard to that enjoyment, as we noted, an appreciation of one's identity is a necessary condition for happiness. **If this self-awareness is to motivate action, however, one must experience his self as objectively real (Premise 5).** What does this mean, and why does it present us with a problem?

The problem arises because **one's direct awareness of oneself is introspective (Premise 2)** Of course, one's self includes one's whole person, body as well as mind. Objectivism does not subscribe to any dichotomy between the two. And we are aware of our bodies through interoception (see Chapter 1). In this section, however, we are concerned with the inner aspects of one's being from which one derives his deepest sense of personal identity. We are concerned with the self as "The thing that thinks and values and makes decisions," as Ayn Rand put it in *The Fountainhead*. And we are aware of these inner dimensions of our being only through introspection. **But one's fullest experience of objective reality is the perceptual awareness of concretes (Premise 3).**

Premise 3 also played a role in the demonstration that art is a value. Indeed, the logic of the need for visibility is exactly parallel to that of the need for art. Perception is the foundation of all other knowledge. As our only form of direct cognitive contact with the world, it is the touchstone and benchmark of our sense of reality. In the case of art, the argument turned on the contrast between the abstractness of one's philosophical convictions and the concreteness of perception. In the case of visibility, the argument turns on the contrast between the *introspective* access we have to our selves and the *external* focus of perception. In Chapter 1, when we discussed the axioms, we noted that in perception we are aware of things as existing, as having identities, as being what they are independently of our awareness of them. This is the source of our concept of objectivity, and perception gives us our fullest, most immediate, and most powerful experience of objectivity. Introspection, by contrast, is a mode of awareness internal to our consciousness. Even here, of course, the primacy of existence still applies: our thoughts, feelings, values, personality, character, etc., exist and are what they are. But our awareness of them lacks the full and immediate sense of objectivity that external perception provides.

By contrast with the solid presence of a chair, or of one's body as one sits in it, a thought or feeling can seem intangible, fleeting, not fully real. And the permanent aspects of the self such as personality and character are hard to discern accurately because they are parts of a background that pervades all one's thought and actions: there is no immediate contrast object. We can conclude that **to experience the objective reality of oneself more fully, one must expe-**

rience it in concrete, perceptible form (Premise 6). This intermediate conclusion follows from Premises 2 and 3. And because we do need to experience ourselves as objectively real (Premises 4 and 5), we can conclude that **man needs to experience himself in a concrete, perceptible form (Premise 7).**

That is what visibility does for us. That is why visibility is an important value. As **Premise 8** states, **visibility from others provides a concrete, perceptible experience of self.** This is an inductive conclusion, based on the abundant data we all have from our relationships with other people, along with the insights of psychologists.

The phenomenon of visibility works in two ways:

1) Other people embody values just as we do, so getting to know someone who embodies one's own values allows us to experience the traits we value in a perceptible form. For instance, one pleasurable aspect of interacting with one's siblings is experiencing mannerisms and often fundamental attitudes much like one's own. Similarly, getting to know people with whom one shares a concrete interest, such as painting or foreign cultures, allows one to experience, in an external form, the engagement with that subject we usually only feel from the inside. One need not even be intimate with someone to experience this kind of visibility: one may admire a stranger for his character traits, for instance, or identify with a figure from history.

2) The way people respond to us gives another form of visibility. When a person responds to one in conversation, for example, he is responding to the ideas and sentiments that one has expressed, as well as to the manner of the expression. One can "gauge" oneself by the way the other person reacts. This effect is especially powerful in intimate interactions, such as profound friendship or romantic love, because the respondent is then much more aware of one's whole self, by dint of experience. Also, one's own familiarity with and admiration for the respondent increases one's awareness of the meaning of the response. This is one aspect of what makes romantic relationships so powerful, but it operates in all sorts of relationships, to varying degrees, and one can get this kind of visibility for certain aspects of oneself, as an actor does when an audience applauds his show.

We can only determine by introspection whether these two types of visibility are actually an important part of what we get psychologically from social intercourse. A secondary source of information is psychological research. Given Premise 8, we are able to conclude Diagram 4.5 by a final inference from it and the previously established Premise 7. Since visibility is a means of gaining a concrete experience of oneself, and since one needs such an experience, we can infer that **man needs visibility from others.**

This conclusion is confirmed inductively by the felt need for relationships, by the loneliness and isolation one feels at the absence or loss of such relationships in one's life. As in the case of art, we need this inductive evidence

not only to confirm but to complete the deductive argument. After all, there are forms of visibility other than the kind we get from other people. One can look at oneself in the mirror. One can watch oneself on a videotape. Someone who is learning to perform in public, for example, can usually benefit from seeing a video recording of himself performing: it allows him to discern, as an external observer, mannerisms that he could not discriminate clearly on the introspective level. Indeed, the sense of strangeness that most people experience when they first see themselves on videotape is a graphic illustration of the difference between introspection and perception as modes of awareness of the self.

There are yet other forms of visibility. Most people take satisfaction in arranging and decorating their homes according to their taste, and take pleasure in seeing themselves reflected in their surroundings. And one component in the pride we take in viewing a project we have completed—a book manuscript, a successful meeting, a garden in bloom—is the awareness of it as an embodiment of our effort and creative vision. Nevertheless, none of these other forms of visibility can provide us with as full an awareness of our identities as can the interaction with people who can respond to the full range of our personalities and characters.

It's important to note that visibility is but one of the constellation of values one can gain from a social relationship. Any relationship gives one opportunities to gain values from economic exchange and communication, as well as visibility. In a typical family, for example, members offer each other financial assistance from time to time, and communicate ideas and lessons from life to each other (to say nothing of parents educating children), on top of providing other members with an enhanced awareness of their own identities.

Conclusion

Now we have achieved a better understanding of the cardinal values, and some important spiritual and social values. We have also surveyed, by example, the method by which Objectivism traces values back to the ultimate value of life. In other words, we have developed a clear sense of the “what” of ethics: what we should act for. Now we are ready for the “how.” That is the subject of the next chapter.

The values that we have identified in this chapter reflect universal human needs, and we have accordingly stated them in the abstract. As we noted in Chapter 2, when we discussed the connection between needs and values, each person has these needs in a specific individual form. People differ in the particular forms of art to which they can respond, for example, or in the relative importance in their lives of close romantic relationships. Within the abstract structure of values we have identified, each person must develop his personal hierarchy of values to seek in life and guide one's daily decisions. Our abstract

analysis will not dictate those personal commitments. But it does have three important functions:

- It grounds basic human values in the alternative of existence or non-existence, thus showing how they are objective.
- By connecting survival to values such as friendship and art, it begins to show how survival requires flourishing, or in other words, how achieving a “mere” life requires living a good life. We will flesh this out even more in coming chapters.
- It shows that these values are logically consistent, because they reflect a moral goal and a reality that are non-contradictory, and thus that a “state of non-contradictory joy,” i.e. happiness, is possible in life.

1 What Rand calls the cardinal value of Self-Esteem, we call the cardinal value of Self. The reasons for this will be made clear as we discuss the diagram. There is a common usage of “cardinal” that means “quantified,” and is usually contrasted in discussion of value with ordinal value. This is not the meaning of “cardinal” in this case. Rather, it refers to something that is of foremost importance.

2 “Galt’s Speech,” FNI 128

3 The relationship between valuation and a beneficiary can seem confusing if we ignore the life-supporting ethological character of value. It is true that, having free will, a person can “act to gain and/or keep” ends which are of no benefit to himself. This is what self-sacrifice amounts to. While it is true that such ends can be esteemed and acted for intentionally, as if they were values, in the Objectivist analysis this is a faulty application of the human capacity for acting purposefully, and a misapplication of concepts such as benefit, value, etc. Thus, we must distinguish from a person’s value-system, which may fail to be objective while implicitly accepting the choice to live, from an arbitrary assertion of purposes that are unconnected with life.

4 Induction and deduction are treated, as the reader will recall, in the Introduction.

5 Citation on anxieties needed. See Alan Waterman, *The Psychology of Individualism**?

6 [*Aging and active mind? Ask Ken L.]

7 Readings on religious wars include, e.g. C.V. Wedgwood *The Thirty Years War* (London: Pimlico, 1992 [1938]). See Simon Schama *Citizens, a Chronicle of the French Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1989) for an assessment of the role of irrationalism, especially elevation of sentiment over pru-

dence, in the coming of the Terror of 1793, and the imperialism that followed. For irrationalism in Nazism, see Leonard Peikoff *The Ominous Parallels* (New York: Meridian, 1993).

- 8 References on Enlightenment, Song Dynasty social conditions*
- 9 Rand, “The Objectivist Ethics,” 25. In his *Objectivism*, 298, Leonard Peikoff confines his discussion of purpose as a cardinal value to the context of product work as man’s central purpose. We address this approach in Chapter 5.
- 10 *Atlas Shrugged*. 94
- 11 David Schmidt “Choosing Ends” in *Ethics* 104 (January 1994) 226-251 considers how people choose broad goals intended to invest meaning into their lives and provide the basis for choosing among subsidiary values. Having the broad goal of choosing a career is one example he treats.
- 12 See also Viktor Frankl *Man’s Search for Meaning* (New York: Touchstone, 1984) for a discussion of a therapeutic approach centered on attributing meaning to life.
- 13 See e.g. Donald F. Klein and Paul M. Wender *Understanding Depression* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) New York: Oxford, 1994 119, 122. Note that it is well established that severe depression often has a biochemical basis that can be alleviated with proper medication, although therapy is still useful in many of these cases. Thus the fact that person is depressed cannot serve as *prima facie* evidence for any sort of moral shortcoming.
- 14 The wave of corporate reorganization in North America during the 1980s and 1990s has often involved the management of firms refocusing their activities on the basic purpose of maximizing value for shareholders. Business firms are unlike many organizations in having such a narrow ultimate goal.
- 15 *Cites on progress attitudes among Victorians, Asian Tigers: Horatio Alger, Gertrude Himmelfarb? On East Asia: Ezra Vogel e.g. *Japan as Number One* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985 [1979]) or *One Step Ahead in China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).
- 16 Of course, the ethics of self-sacrifice have gained prestige from the perceived success of groups that practice it, including conquerors such as the Romans, and religions such as Islam and Christianity. But it is certainly plausible to point out that these ancient societies tended to become rigid and stagnant, and often were prone to internal conflict, all conditions that tend to harm the lives of individual members of the society in question and lead, in time, to the downfall of its institutions as well. A similar process might be credited with bringing about the victory of the creative, individualistic West over the relatively stagnant, collectivistic Communist Bloc during the 20th- Century “cold war.”
- 17 See e.g. Nathaniel Branden, *Honoring the Self* (Los Angeles: T.P. Archer, 1983) New York: Bantam, 1985 71–79. Branden, a life-long Objectivist, is widely considered a pioneer in the field of self-esteem theory. See also his

The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem (New York: Bantam, 1994) for an overview of this approach to self-esteem. See also Bednar, R. and Peterson, S. *Self-esteem: The puzzle of low self-regard* (New York: Plenum, 1993).

- 18 Part of education must include the independent confirmation of the information one is learning. One may learn ideas directly from others, but one can only be sure of their truth or falsity when one has considered the evidence for them oneself, by experiment, for instance. This confirmation need not be excessively technical: one can test the gravitational constant of earth with a pair of balls, for example, and there is no harm in depending on reliable experts for information so long as one recognizes that such information comes at second-hand. We will address this issue in more detail in our discussion of the virtue of independence, in Chapter 5.
- 19 Of course, neither the hierarchy of knowledge nor the order in which one must acquire it are fixed in such a way that there is always and only one way of coming to a piece of knowledge. However, it is true that one can't understand certain abstract truths without the knowledge they presuppose. For instance, this discussion requires an understanding of what conceptual knowledge is: that is a constraint that cannot be avoided.
- 20 Ayn Rand, "Philosophy and Sense of life," in *The Romantic Manifesto* 2nd rev. ed. (New York: New American Library, 1975) 30.
- 21 See e.g. *ibid.* 34–44.
- 22 Rand, *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, 74.
- 23 In discussing art, we are addressing the essential aspects of what is commonly known as "high art." We neglect an important aspect of esthetics, the theory of beauty, which means also leaving out a discussion of design or decoration, which is the role much so-called "art" performs today.
- 24 Rand's essays on art are collected in Rand, *The Romantic Manifesto*. Peikoff's *OPAR*, Chapter 12, has an able summary of those essays. For a critical study of Rand's aesthetics, and its connections to other aesthetic theories, see Marder-Kamhi and Torres, *What Art Is*.
- 25 Music is the only major form of traditional art that is not obviously a recreation or representation. There are a variety of theories as to how music fits in: Rand supposed that music represented emotional or mood states, and many other thinkers have shared similar views.
- 26 Ayn Rand "The Psycho-Epistemology of Art," in *The Romantic Manifesto* 19.
- 27 Ayn Rand "Art and Cognition," *The Romantic Manifesto* 45.
- 28 "The Psycho-Epistemology of Art," 21
- 29 We do not claim that these three values represent an exhaustive analysis of social values. That would depend on an inductive examination of the range of concrete values, an analysis which, to our knowledge, has never been done in a systematic way in the Objectivist literature.

30 e.g. “The two great values to gained from social existence are: knowledge and trade.” Rand, “The Nature of Government,” in *The Virtue of Selfishness* 107

31 See e.g. Branden *The Psychology of Self-Esteem*, Chapter 11.