

## CONCLUSION

Now we stand on the top of the edifice, looking down. Hopefully, you now have a grasp of how the struts fit together, and where the foundation is; you can see which principles are crucial, and which are ancillary. Now you see Objectivism as a system of ideas.

As we have proceeded together through the logical structure of the philosophy, we have accumulated the inductive evidence for the view of life and man that was distinctively Ayn Rand's. With this full context in mind, we can return to the basic concepts of her philosophy and fully grasp their significance. We see the objective implications of concepts such as *knowledge*, *reason*, *survival*, *life*, *production*, and *character* for personal morality and social order, because we have amassed the evidence of those implications, and traced out the connections that lead from one idea to the next.

### Feedback Loops

Although we have insisted at various points that one's personal hierarchy of values should reflect the importance of various values for one's own life and purposes, and should certainly not duplicate the logical hierarchy of justification that we have traced in this book, we have not had an opportunity to reflect explicitly on importance. Inasmuch as this book concerns universal facts, and not the particular circumstances of our distinct lives, we cannot meaningfully analyze the relative importance of particular values here. However, we can promote some reflection on the difference between logical structure and importance, by tracing some feedback loops to principles we established earlier.

When we surveyed the cardinal values in Chapter 4, we noted that they integrate basic aspects of human living action. Now that we have traced out most of ethics and politics from that inductive base, enriching our understanding of human nature in the process, we can return to those values with a rich sense of their content as guides that orient us in life. We can see that *reason* requires honesty, independence, and freedom from force; that one's *purposes* imply a commitment to enact them (productiveness); and that one's need to value *oneself* entails a commitment to pride.

Productiveness and pride are both virtues that have been enriched, for their own part, by integrations we have made since we originally justified them. We have seen in Chapter 6 that only when we grasp the importance of trade as a social ethic, and see the need for a commitment to existential independence, are we able to flesh out what productiveness means in practice. *Productiveness* is, in its broadest sense (diagram 5.7), *the commitment to taking responsibility for achieving one's values*. To this *existential independence* (diagram 6.5) adds: *...by one's own effort!* And *the trader principle* (diagram 6.7) contributes: *...and*

by creating value for voluntary exchange with others to mutual benefit. Recognizing the importance of trade buttresses the argument for *productive work* (diagram 5.5) as well. It is only when we look at productiveness in this full context that we begin to see what it means to take *responsibility* for one's values, and the thoroughgoing, vital importance of this virtue in daily life as the principle of purpose in action.

We discussed pride at the end of Chapter 5, because one would need pride even if one lived alone in a wilderness. But as we noted in discussing *cognitive independence* (diagram 6.1), in society our pride is empty without the conviction that we truly have acted by our own judgment, and therefore may take credit for our accomplishments as individuals. Psychologically, pride—through the self-esteem it achieves—is a buttress against society in one's own mind, a means of recognizing and appreciating what is individual and distinct in oneself. This is why when people say someone is “proud,” they often mean that person is self-sufficient, that he takes profound satisfaction and happiness from his own doings, his own achievements, his own life. In fact, pride is the crown not only of the virtues that pertain exclusively to the individual, but of all the moral principles we have enunciated. One can, and should, take pride in one's respect for the rights of others, and take pride by upholding one's own rights. A person who lives by trade is a proud person, one who appreciates his own worth and takes both spiritual credit and material cash for what he provides to others. Our pride directs us to acts of benevolence, as instances of magnanimity.<sup>1</sup> Finally, as a moral compass, pride directs us not merely to aspire to the benevolent society of freedom, but more profoundly to become the kind of person who exemplifies the principles that flourish in such a society.

To integrate the values and virtues we have discussed here into your own particular circumstances, you will need reflect on the ways in which they play out in your life. For this task, this book can provide you with a method, but only you have the additional inductive evidence that is needed, and it is only to you that the ultimate benefit redounds.

### **A Flourishing Life**

During our discussion of the foundations of ethics in Chapter 2, we criticized an interpretation of Rand's position known as “Flourishing.” This thesis holds that virtues such as honesty, rationality, integrity and respect for others' freedom are all constituent aspects of a human life well-lived.<sup>2</sup> Since the human life well-lived is the goal of ethics, the rational recognition of the constitutive character of these virtues is sufficient, in the “flourishing” view, to specify the content of morality. The trouble with this position as its usually stated is that it takes for granted that which most needs demonstration, namely what it is that the human life well-lived consists in. One would need to demonstrate what “well-

lived” (as opposed to “poorly lived”) amounts to. One would need to show what values the successful life entails, and demonstrate how each of the virtues contributed to that life. Only in this way would one have rational grounds for regarding any particular capacity or good as a means (either constitutive or instrumental) to the good life.

The arguments that we have diagrammed and examined in this book accomplish that task. We have taken the concept of “value” down to its roots in the conditional nature of life. We have related this survival-based, biocentric conception of value to our emotional experience of benefit and harm, and — most notably— to happiness, which is the psychological concomitant and reward of success in maintaining one’s life. We have seen how production provides the bridge between our material needs and the spiritual needs for reason, philosophy, art, and love that are commonly recognized as the glories of the human experience. We have seen that we need integrity and a healthy moral character, and that the virtues actually support our lives in the most basic sense. We have seen that there is no contradiction between justifying our values and virtues logically as *practical means* to life, on the one hand, and appreciating them emotionally as powerfully important *personal ideals*, on the other. This is how one’s commitment to respect the freedom of others can be at once something one recognizes as a means to one’s survival, and the most basic form of desert that one accords to other human beings.

In short, we have shown that a life lived so as to enhance one’s chances of survival is a life well-lived, a happy life, a flourishing life. For each of us the ongoing challenge, and glory of our existence, is to go on flourishing.

## Living Principles

In closing, the authors would like to note that we hope the logical structure of Objectivism will flourish much as living beings do. This work summarizes many complex and abstract issues, including vast ranges of inductive evidence that we could not address here at any level of detail. To a great degree addressing that evidence the task of specialized researchers in the various disciplines we have cited in the diagrams and the text. As a living set of ideas, we expect that that the perusal of the diagrams in this book will suggest fruitful areas for further research on and development of the philosophy of Objectivism. There are numerous interesting technical issues that we could only touch on in a note here or brief sentence there, and many we could not address at all. There is more work to be done on this edifice; we hope this book will help others to do some of it.

We hope as well that our readers will approach the arguments and diagrams herein as work-in-progress. We do not mean this as a confession of uncertainty, but as an expression of our hope that you will bring your own, first-hand

perspective to the logical structure. The purpose of the diagrams is to help you see the connections between the ideas; to grasp the connections, one needs to be willing to imagine alternatives both in substance and in degree of abstraction. Even though we expect you will find that what we argued is true, we hope you will do so by your own process of validation. In many ways, validation of these ideas is a process that continues indefinitely as one acquires new inductive evidence and reaches new integrations. That's how it is with living ideas: they can grow and change.

Objectivism is not merely a body of theory for contemplation. It is a body of practical principles for living the good life. So we most especially hope to see the fruit that your systematic understanding of the philosophy will bear as you apply it to your life, and promote it in society at large. Live it, and teach us all by your example.

<sup>1</sup> Kelley, *Unrugged Individualism* 44–45

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Rasmussen and Den Uyl *Liberty and Nature*