

Objective Communication

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OBJECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Part One

CERTAINTY

It is the purpose of this paper to consider the question: “Can man ever be certain of the truth of any statement?”—or, as it is often phrased: “Is certain knowledge possible?”

I shall attempt to demonstrate the truth of my position on this issue, viz. that certain knowledge of reality *is* possible to man, by pointing out that any other position involves one in a contradiction. The position of those who maintain that no knowledge can be certain is most consistently stated by those who apply their position to the very statement of their case, those, that is, who maintain that they cannot even be certain that certainty is impossible. This type of advocate of uncertainty believes, and believes rightly, that he is the only non-contradictory upholder of universal uncertainty, for, he would say, if anyone maintained that he knew as a certainty that it was impossible to know anything as a certainty, he would be upholding a blatant contradiction. Consequently, the consistent statement of the belief in universal uncertainty is this: Man cannot be certain of anything, and he cannot be certain that he cannot be certain of anything, and he cannot be certain that he cannot be certain that he cannot be certain of anything . . . and so on to infinity. At no point can a state of certainty be reached, and consequently even uncertainty is uncertain, and uncertainty of uncertainty is uncertain, and so on back to infinity.

What I wish to demonstrate now is that this most consistent version of the belief in universal uncertainty is itself *not* an intellectual position, that nothing is being said when one asserts such a position, and consequently, that no refutation nor even consideration of the position is necessary, since nothing is being asserted which one could consider or refute. The truth of this derives from the Law of Excluded Middle, which states that anything (call it “x”) about which men talk or think *either exists or does not exist*. It follows that in any discussion about “x” *only two positions are possible*: that x exists or that it does not exist. To say that one is uncertain of the existence of x is not an intellectual position *on the subject of x’s existence*; it is the expression of a lack of knowledge about the existence or non-existence of x. Consequently, the statement that one is uncertain of x’s existence is irrelevant to the question of x’s existence. One need not consider and one cannot refute a confession of a lack of knowledge. The advocates of universal uncertainty, however, are in this position with regard to any x whatever. Of no x can they say: it exists or it does not exist; their statement must always be that they are uncertain of x’s existence. Even with regard to the x which stands for universal uncertainty, the advocates of universal uncertainty cannot assert its existence or non-existence; they can only state that they are uncertain of its existence, and this process must, as has been pointed out, continue backwards to infinity. It follows, therefore, that the believers in universal uncertainty cannot assert the existence or non-existence of any x whatever, and

that means that they cannot assert any intellectual position. The most that they can do is to confess ignorance or uncertainty about a subject, and even that they cannot do non-contradictorily without carrying the process of perpetual uncertainty back to infinity. Consequently, believers in universal uncertainty never say anything about existence, and, since there is nothing but existence about which to say things, they never say anything about anything, i.e., they say nothing. But saying nothing does not constitute an intellectual position; a confession of total ignorance is not an argument. Consequently, in any intellectual discussion, believers in perpetual and universal uncertainty must, of necessity, be ignored; one cannot consider nor refute that which has not been said.

Believers in perpetual uncertainty have attempted to save their position from the above consequences by asserting that there is one thing man can know as a certainty, and that is that he can never know anything else as a certainty. In this way, an escape from an infinite regress with its fatal consequences is afforded. However, believers in this viewpoint do not recognize that, in admitting the existence of even one certainty, they are giving up the case for otherwise universal uncertainty. Consider the number of truths about which a man must be certain, before he could be *certain* that certainty was impossible. He must be certain that something exists *about* which he is uncertain; that he, who *is* uncertain, exists; that he, who is certain of uncertainty, is capable of being certain of (at least part) of that which exists; that the Law of Identity is true, for otherwise his position is and is not what it is, and under those conditions it could never be certain; that language has meaning, for otherwise his position is meaningless and consequently neither certain nor uncertain; that his position is capable of being communicated to other minds, for otherwise he is beyond the pale of intellectual discussion; and so on. But when all of these certainties are admitted, and all of them must be to enable the believer in the certainty of uncertainty to state his position intelligibly, what is left of the case for universal uncertainty? If a mind exists, capable of knowing for certain facts of reality and communicating them intelligibly to other minds, wherein lie the reasons for believing in universal uncertainty?

It is clear, then, that in the very statement of the position of universal uncertainty, one is either saying nothing at all or one is contradicting oneself. However, the contradictions become even more apparent when one considers the arguments advanced to support the position. All of the arguments, beneath their surface variations, have, of necessity, one point in common: viz. that the very conception of certainty is itself contradictory. There is no way of establishing the impossibility of the existence of anything except by showing that the thing in question is a contradiction, for contradictions are the only things which are necessarily incapable of existence. Consequently, if one wished to *demonstrate* that certainty could never exist (as opposed to merely stating it arbitrarily), one would have to resort to some form of argument proving that certainty is a contradictory conception. "Certainty" and "round squares" would have to be shown to be in the same class, for if certainty *were* a thoroughly consistent and non-contradictory conception, one could never establish the

impossibility of its existence. As soon, however, as one does establish that certainty is contradictory and hence incapable of existence, it follows, since everything man thinks must be either certain or uncertain, that everything man thinks is uncertain and doubtful.

What the advocates of universal uncertainty do not realize is that in asserting that certainty is a contradictory conception, which they must do to establish their position, they are *ipso facto* rendering their own position—viz. that everything man thinks is uncertain and doubtful—meaningless. This can be shown as follows: Doubt and uncertainty are nothing more nor less than the *absence of certainty*. (This can be verified by an appeal to any standard dictionary.) Consequently, the meanings of “doubt” and “uncertainty” are dependent on the meaning of “certainty,” for the “absence of x” means what it means only because “x” means what it does. However, if certainty is a contradictory conception, it is meaningless, for all contradictory conceptions are, with reference to their meaning, in the same class as “round squares.” Being contradictions, they stand for non-existents, i.e., for nothing, i.e., they are meaningless. But if “certainty” is a meaningless conception, then the “absence of certainty” is a meaningless conception, for the absence of something meaningless is itself meaningless. In the same way in which “gribble,” if it stood for the absence of round squares, would be meaningless, “uncertainty” or “doubt,” if it stands for the absence of certainty, is meaningless. Consequently, when the conception of certainty is abandoned, the conception of uncertainty must also be abandoned. But, when this is done, the advocates of universal and perpetual doubt cannot even state their case, and a case which cannot even be stated certainly does not require refutation in order to be ignored. . . .

One of the apparent implications of the theory of universal uncertainty, is that all statements are equally true or false, since all statements are equally uncertain. Believers in the theory of universal uncertainty attempt to save their position from this consequence by asserting that, although *certainty* can never be achieved, uncertainty exists in varying *degrees*, and consequently, some statements, being *less* uncertain than others, have more value. (This position is also expressed by saying that certain statements are more *probable* than others.) If, however, the above arguments are accepted, it follows that, if certainty is impossible and hence meaningless, uncertainty is impossible and hence meaningless, and consequently that *degrees of uncertainty* or probability is impossible and hence meaningless, since degrees of a meaningless conception is itself a meaningless conception. This means that, if total certainty is not possible, degrees of probability are not possible, and consequently that all statements are equally probable or improbable, and that no differentiation between statements with reference to their truth-value can be made. But that would mean that there is no difference in intellectual value between the assertion of a maniac that he is a sliced cucumber salad, and the Theory of Relativity advanced by Einstein as an explanation of the entire physical universe. And when this conclusion is endorsed, men have reached the final stage of intellectual bankruptcy.

THE DRAFT

The military draft is an evil institution, which should be rejected by every civilized government. The draft is a gross violation of the rights of the draftees.

The conservatives today favor the draft, but they can be ignored, because they argue on the basis of religion, which is irrational and unproven. The liberals are against the draft, but only because they disapprove of the present war. The war, however, is not really that important. The issue is one of principle.

Since man's life is the basic standard of moral value, by which all actions must be judged, any action which harms or threatens human life, is wrong. And the draft, incontestably, threatens and often harms the lives of the young men drafted: it sends them off into foreign wars, against their own choice, where they can easily be killed or wounded.

It may be said that the draftees will help to save an entire country from the enemy and, therefore, that the net effect of the draft is to preserve man's life. This is the altruistic idea that service to others is good—which I firmly reject. Altruism holds that man should suffer (e.g., Kant). Selfishness is the only proper approach to morality.

Selfishness does not mean trampling on others or doing whatever one feels like. It means acting in such a way as to preserve one's own life, without sacrificing for others or accepting their sacrifices. And to fight in a war one does not believe in, is definitely a sacrifice.

I don't mean to suggest that one should act on whatever one happens to believe, regardless of the reasons for it. One should always act on *objective* conclusions, which one can prove by logic. Even if a young man is mistaken about the advisability of a given war, however, it is still *objectively wrong* to force him into it against his own beliefs: when you force a man into the army, you are really forcing his mind, and thus destroying it in the long run. Even if the young man has been irrational about rejecting the war, it is still *his mind's* conclusion, and as such it must be respected by others.

It may be said that if a young man is wrong about a given war, then the government, in forcing him to act on the proper viewpoint, is forcing the *truth* on him, and thus is really helping his mind. How can the government be so certain of what is true? Does it know more than the citizens? How can it set itself up as the absolute judge? Is there no room in a free country for disagreement?

History proves that the draft is impractical. In a free country, men always volunteer (if they approve of the war), and they perform more efficiently than conscripted troops. This is especially true in the modern age, with our different weapons. The real issue, therefore, is motivating men to enlist voluntarily, which means: paying them enough, i.e., the real issue today is money. We need merely cut out some useless welfare programs and give the tax money instead to the military.

Of course, a government should not have the power to tax, any more than it should have the power to draft. But you cannot undo all the controls at

once. And the right to life is more important than the right to property, since it is the source of all rights.

Those who grasp the above will have no difficulty in seeing the draft as merely one more example of the evil of the statist, whose only concern is to augment their power over the country. If one understands what the draft-champions are proposing, and what it would do to this country's youth, the statist's evil becomes inescapable.

EXCERPTS

- (a) “Justice” means having the right idea about men, and acting on it at all times. By the “right” idea, I mean one based on the facts of reality. Most times, the appropriate action is a trade, i.e., giving others the equivalent of what they give you.
- (b) In a proper capitalist system, as a matter of *law*, no individual and no government can exert a deleterious influence on the achievement of any other person’s rightful values or goals.
- (c) [From a paper on why the pursuit of happiness cannot be arbitrary.] Just as everything else in the universe has a specific identity, so does man. No man, to be sure, is the same as any other; there are innumerable stylistic, optional, particular differences among individuals. But the unalterable fact is that man must *use* the single most important tool of his survival—his mind. He must at once seek, and want to seek, nothing but the goals consonant with the life of a rational being.
- (d) [Start of a college assignment on the topic: “Will America’s obsession with repentance prevent Senator Kennedy from gaining the Democratic Presidential nomination in 1980?”] It is a good thing that Americans are “obsessed with repentance.” “Repentance,” in this context, means concern about morality. If anyone ever gave pause to a moral man’s mind, Edward Kennedy would certainly be at the top of the list. And he is growing closer to the bottom of America’s Presidential candidate list for the same reason.

There are two essential things a voter must judge about a candidate: his ideas and his character (has he got integrity, honesty, rational judgment, etc.). By his political ideas alone, Kennedy is evil. But the campaign has focused more, so far, on his character, which, as people are beginning to see, is as bad as the ideas which molded it.

Kennedy is a man who thinks he can get away with anything. And he has. He is caught cheating in college. He is caught trying to outrun the police in a speed chase. He is well-known for his adulterous affairs. He panics and is responsible for the death of a young woman and lies about it repeatedly. How does Kennedy get away with such blatant immorality? He has the Kennedy family power and image to rescue him. It has operated for him in the past. Today, in a losing struggle for the esteem of Americans, Kennedy is panicking again. He embarrasses himself by declaring (in answer to Vice President Mondale’s accusation) that neither he nor any of his brothers can be accused of disloyalty. A statement like that from this man means that he is sinking and will say anything to save his image even if it means robbing the graves of his dead brothers for the prestige he will never earn. . . .

(e) [From a polemic against altruism] If you chose to be an altruist, you would have to devote your time, your effort, your life to serving others. But if you did, when would you have the time to sustain your own life so that you could go on serving others? For if you wanted to be moral according to altruism, you could not take a single action which would benefit yourself. To do so would be immoral. Your mind, therefore, would have to stagnate. You would not be able to earn money to buy food. To do so would benefit no one but yourself. You would starve.

(f) [From a paper which defends the policy of lecturing by college teachers] One stock charge made against lecturing is that it is “spoonfeeding” the student, that the student never has a chance to think for himself.

I am sure that the “spoonfeeder” type of lecturer is definitely bad, for his lectures amount to muttering a few facts about the subject matter of the course and, most often, spouting many evaluations. This “spoonfeeder” takes the liberty and the power (of being in front of a class) to inject his personal opinions whenever he gets the chance. His commonest comments are something like this: “Of course, today, we know that Aristotelian logic is out-of-date and completely indefensible,” or “Obviously, Milton was the greatest poet ever to have lived.” The “spoonfeeder,” I’m sure, never even conceives the possibility that someone believes Aristotelian logic to be sound and very relevant to today or Milton’s poetry to be poor. He may think of this possibility and consequently allow a few students to disagree with him. Many times the “spoonfeeder” glosses over the student’s disagreement by saying that everything is a matter of opinion. At best, the “spoonfeeder” may give some careful consideration to the student’s opinions.

The point, however, is that the teacher dare inject any of his own opinions in the classroom at all. And this is the major fault of the few teachers who do lecture. Colleges are supposed to be citadels of the intellect with the pursuit of truth as their major goal and academic freedom as the means to that goal. This means that each student comes to college in order to pursue knowledge and truth; and each student must decide for himself what constitutes truth in any particular field. Consequently, any teacher who frequently injects his own opinions in the classroom is denying the student his academic freedom to pursue the truth *as* he sees it. In other words, the greatest sin any teacher could commit in the classroom is to inject his own opinions in his lectures. The evaluations must come from the students; the facts from the teacher. . . .

(g) [From a polemic against Hume] According to Hume, we value whatever is pleasant and call evil that which is painful. But there is nothing to guarantee that the values selected in this manner will be based on the standard of life. Thinking, for example, is a painful process for many people, yet thought is man’s primary tool of survival. On the

other hand, a man may avoid thinking and perhaps live pleurably off the effort of those who do think, by either begging or stealing; but by the code whose standard is life, non-thinking is evil because it destroys Man's life. Therefore a man whose values are acquired by Hume's method could hold irrational values, and, in fact, it would be very unusual to find a man holding a rational, consistent set of values which he had acquired by seeking pleasure and avoiding pain.

- (h) An "axiom" is an explicit statement of fact so fundamental as to be self-evidently true. (Self-evidence is one of the distinctive features of an axiom.) The primary philosophic axioms are: "Existence exists"; "Existence is Identity"; and "Consciousness is Identification."
- (i) [Start of a paper on the evil of initiating force] Most species of animal are adapted to their environment. Their tools of survival have a limited range; beyond that range they cannot function. Man is different. Because he can adapt his environment to himself, he is not limited to a specific natural habitat; there is no natural condition in which he could not, in principle, survive. There is, however, one *social* condition incompatible with the human form of existence, a condition that vitiates man's means of survival. That condition is coercion.
- (j) [From an attack on government aid to the arts] It is bad enough that so many aspects of our lives are subject to government direction. But to drag the lofty sphere of the arts down to the murky depths of politics with the government ultimately deciding how much money is to be made available, and under what conditions, and which art works are "worthy" of support and which aren't—is a degradation that art surely does not deserve.
- (k) [From a discussion of women's books] Any attack on the other sex—as a collective—is an attack on one's own sex. Attacks on females as a sex are more devastating to the male than may seem likely at first glance. It is too little realized that women have been used as decoys behind which the attack on the male has continued unabated and unidentified for years.

In almost any novel you pick up, you will be informed at least once and usually more often, through narrative, description or dialogue, that "all females are treacherous" or "illogical" or "untrustworthy" or a "necessary evil." But if this is so, what does it say about the men who love women? It says that they are corrupt and self-destructive by nature.

You've heard it repeated in movies, novels and from co-workers that the presence of a woman in an office filled with men is trouble; that the simple fact that a woman is around means that men will behave in an unseemly manner; that it is the presence of a woman which is

the cause of such behavior. In other words: women are responsible for men's actions. But if this is so, what does it say about a man's view of himself? It says that he is a crawling, helpless robot at the beck and call of another human being, with no power to assert his own desires.

It is pathetic that few realize the actual purpose of the attacks upon the female as a sex.

- (1) [From a discussion of free will] The conceptual faculty cannot be deterministic. There is no way man could automatically conceptualize without some means of selectivity. The field of what concepts could be formed is too wide. If a man were automatically programmed to form all the concepts suggested by the things he saw and heard at every waking moment, he would starve, because every new thing would launch his brain into overdrive in a continuous rush and he would never have time to act. And he could not be programmed only to think and act in a pro-life way, because a concrete action that might be pro-life in one instance might not be in another, and he has to have the capacity to choose in each instance. There is no automatic way of thinking that could be programmed into the species: each man's conceptual experience as he goes through life will be different.
- (m) [Start of a college paper on the base of morality] Let's assume that there is a society with no moral concepts (assume, for instance, that this society is a generation which was brought up in isolation, without any "moral training" by parents). A philosopher from our society confronts them and tries to get them to accept an explicit morality; he tells them they need a set of rules to guide their actions. The spokesman for the amoral society asks: To guide our actions *toward what?*—and *why?*

The moralist has three possible lines of reply. (1) He points to some actual goal of the amoralist, which moral rules would help to foster—e.g., "If you give up smoking, you won't contract cancer; therefore, don't smoke." Or: (2) He points to a goal which, he claims, the amoralist *should* hold—e.g., "If you give to charity you are helping others, and you should always help others." Or: (3) He merely repeats his claim that men need moral rules, with no further elaboration.

Obviously, (3) would be dismissed as no answer by any rational man. If (2) is chosen, the amoralist will now repeat his question about the new claim (e.g., "*Why* should I help others?"), thus facing the moralist with the same three choices again. Eventually, the man who chooses (2) will be forced into justifying it at some point with an argument of type (1) or (3). But (3) is invalid. Hence, any rational morality must be based on values which human beings already hold.

Morality cannot tell people what they *should* value. It has no way to prove its start. It has to start with what people actually want or desire.

OBJECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Part Two

PRIMACY OF CONSCIOUSNESS: SOME MANIFESTATIONS

“That drive was one where all sorts of thoughts went through my mind: one of complete disbelief that what had happened, happened; I remember looking out the window and *trying to hope* that I was going to see her walking down the road; as I miraculously had escaped that perhaps she had miraculously escaped as well. I really *willed* it in my mind that she survived and really *forced* myself to believe that she did. I had these false hopes that perhaps when I first saw the dawn of a new day, it would eliminate and eradicate the nightmare of the night before. I *prayed* that that would happen, that in the morning it would be passed and that in some miraculous way, Mary Jo had returned to the cottage.” [Emphasis added.]

In an attempt to defend actions which resulted in the death of a young woman in 1969, Senator Edward M. Kennedy made the above statements during a 1974 interview. Would *you* deal with a man who, when confronted with the facts of reality, had to “force himself” to believe otherwise?

Why would a man think this way? What is the cause, the basic philosophic principle involved that made possible such a course of action and thought? A clue to the answer can be found by identifying the assumptions that Kennedy’s statements make about the relationship between man’s mind and the external world, between consciousness and existence. First is that if existence is not what one wants it to be, one can try to change it; that the facts can be created by one’s “will,” by “trying to hope,” or by “praying,” i.e., by an act of consciousness. This means that existence is dependent upon consciousness. The second assumption is that one does not need to look *outward* in order to know existence but one can look *inward* at the thoughts in one’s own mind and “force oneself to believe” that existence will be what one wants it to be.

This view of the relationship between existence and consciousness is called *the Primacy of Consciousness*. Metaphysically, it is “the notion that the universe has no independent existence, that it is a product of consciousness. . . . The epistemological corollary is the notion that man gains knowledge of reality by looking inward”¹ at consciousness. Thus, consciousness has metaphysical primacy.

This principle, I submit, dominates today’s cultural atmosphere and is the cause of our cultural disintegration. This can be seen in the sphere of human action in which all human beings participate: the economy, and the controls imposed on it.

Consider the antitrust laws in the United States. One of the alleged main purposes of the Sherman Act of 1890 was to prevent individuals or companies from engaging in practices which would result in “restraint of trade” among the States of the United States. It did so by declaring that every contract which

is found to be in restraint of trade is illegal. However, how does the judicial system define “restraint of trade”? In his analysis of antitrust laws, A. D. Neale points out that “unfortunately, no straightforward definition can be given, for ‘restraint of trade’ is a legal term of art, deriving its meaning from the current decisions and constructions making up the particular body of law in which it appears. . . . Thus, where antitrust is concerned, nothing less than the whole body of case-law constitutes the definition of ‘restraint of trade’; it can be given, if at all, at the end of the book but not at the beginning. . . . The courts in the United States have been engaged ever since 1890 in deciding case by case exactly what the law proscribes.”²

How does a judge interpret and apply the provisions in the Sherman Act? Judge Learned Hand said of such a task that “the words he must construe are empty vessels into which he can put nearly anything he will.”³

One government official, Emanuel Celler, an ex-chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, has stated, “I want to make it clear that I would vigorously oppose any antitrust laws that attempted to particularize violations, giving bills of particulars to replace general principles. The law must remain fluid, allowing for a dynamic society.”⁴ Thus, the government official wants *law*—the reality within which the businessman functions—to remain fluid, dependent on the government officials’ minds’ formulation and interpretation.

Try to imagine the mind of a businessman who would act within the context of the antitrust laws. He would have to follow *every* antitrust case and retain all the evidence of the “whole body of case-law” in an attempt to define the concept of “restraint of trade.” This would be necessary in order for him to know whether or not he was acting illegally. What would be the status of such a definition which, after *he* had been on trial, could be amended by the judge’s “will”?

What possible courses of action and thought would such a businessman take? One possibility could be to simply accept the government officials’ words because “the law must be obeyed.” A second possibility is as follows. The businessman looks *inward* at his own consciousness and his desire to produce and trade goods. He also observes that reality depends on the officials’ minds. He notices that, at times, the reality created by others clashes with his desire. To alleviate this, he uses the premises that reality depends on consciousness and that knowledge is acquired by looking *inward* to try to create the reality that is dependent on *his* consciousness: his desire to produce and trade goods. Thus, he resorts to techniques of influencing the minds of these “others” by what is commonly called bribery or lobbying, i.e., methods of determining what is in the minds of the government officials.

The primacy of consciousness can now be seen to be the dominant premise of the entire mixed economy, with all of the influence peddling by politicians who “create” reality by means of the laws they do or do not pass. In the field of energy, people want electricity and heat but tax the producers (those who have looked *outward* to discover the means and tools of production) for making “excessive” profits. What is “excessive” profits and who determines it? No answer; consult the minds of the legislators.

What is the fundamental error involved in the primacy of consciousness? The principle is incompatible with the law of identity which holds that an entity is itself, that existence is what it is, that A is A. The primacy of consciousness holds that A can be non-A if consciousness decrees it: a dead woman can be alive if one forces oneself to believe so; businessmen should look outward when producing steel but let's not define "restraint of trade" or "excessive" profits; there's no problem in never defining concepts or "putting nearly anything one wills" into a concept, consciousness decrees it to be so. The primacy of consciousness principle also evades the fact that consciousness can possess knowledge only *after* it has perceived existence; this is the prerequisite for it to identify itself as consciousness.

The dominance of the primacy of consciousness produced today's culture because of the fact that A is A. The function of the mind is to perceive reality. If one holds the mind as constituting the basis of reality, then one must engage in practices to acquire knowledge about the mind with no reference to existence. When one encounters other minds that are not readily amenable, one must use whatever means available to influence these other minds to suit one's own mind. Hence, the spectacle of businessmen falling over each other in attempts to influence a senator's vote.

Today's cultural atmosphere will be reversed only when people reject the primacy of consciousness and uphold the opposite principle: the *Primacy of Existence*. Metaphysically, it is "the axiom that existence exists, i.e., that the universe exists independent of consciousness . . . that things are what they are, that they possess a specific nature, an identity. The epistemological corollary is the axiom that consciousness is the faculty of perceiving that which exists—and that man gains knowledge of reality by looking outward." ⁵

It is on such a base that people will realize that reality cannot be created by their minds, that praying won't make it so, and that businessmen can't produce under conditions of existence which make it impossible to produce.

¹ Ayn Rand, "The Ayn Rand Letter," vol. 2, no. 12; 12 March 1973.

² A.D. Neale, *The Antitrust Laws of the U.S.A.*

³ A.D. Neale, *The Antitrust Laws of the U.S.A.*

⁴ Harold Fleming, *Ten Thousand Commandments*.

⁵ Ayn Rand, "The Ayn Rand Letter," vol. 2, no. 12; 12 March 1973.

LIFE, LIBERTY, AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

Liberty. An American will put his life in jeopardy for it and declare the pursuit of happiness impossible without it. For us, the very sound of the word makes the heart beat a little faster, the shoulders square to support an incomparable value. There can be no doubt of our intention to support it—or of our resolve. And as for understanding it—we believe we understand it better than any other people. Why, we created the very model of liberty: the American Constitution and the Bill of Rights. And yet, we stand by helplessly confused in the face of crisis after crisis: abroad—the issue of ownership of the Panama Canal, detente with the Russians versus military preparedness, the Iranian seizure of our embassy; at home—an inability to evaluate the merits of wage and price controls, gasoline rationing, and welfare programs. In the face of each issue we are unable to discern what action will support liberty and the political rights that implement it. Clearly the deficiency we must repair is in understanding; in order to know what action to take we must first gain a more thorough understanding of what liberty is, and as a consequence what it requires.

At the center of the idea of liberty is the idea of political rights: A man who is free has rights, and a man who does not have them cannot be free. But here also there is confusion; should we respect the public's right to unbiased news or the publisher's right of free speech? Does a worker have the right to a job or does his employer have the right to fire him? Are rights always more important than other considerations—like providing for the poor?

We can evaluate political rights only by evaluating the underlying moral code of which they are the implementation. A physician evaluates a drug by its ability to implement his underlying professional code of ethics: to heal the sick. Without reference to this underlying code he would have no basis upon which to judge any particular drug. Americans are unable to judge between two radically different evaluations of political rights because most Americans believe in elements of two mutually exclusive moral codes.

The man who upholds the first of these two moral codes holds as his supreme value—as the primary value against which all else is measured as good or evil—his own life, its furtherance, and fulfillment. The man who upholds this moral code, rational selfishness, *must* evaluate political rights as a necessity-for without political rights he does not have the right to take the actions necessary to support and further his life, nor the right to keep the products of his labor.

The second moral code is the only other possible alternative: If a man does not hold his own life as his highest value, then something else must occupy that position. But selection of a primary value (that is, a value-standard) determines the value of all else by the criterion of how well it serves the primary value. If the primary value selected is the public good, then everything else including a man's life must be judged by how well it serves the public good. According to such a moral code, rights are a value only so long as they

coincide with the public good—or with what a majority believes is the public good, or with what politicians declare it is. Regardless what is chosen as the primary value—whether a deity, the Aryan race, or the common good—if that value is anything other than man’s life, his life *must* be held as potentially expendable. The physician who holds the advancement of medical knowledge as his *primary* professional ethic must sacrifice his patients to any experiment which may advance medical knowledge.

Nor is it possible to combine two moral codes which have differing primary values. The physician who holds medical progress as his primary value in patient-care may argue that this is compatible with consistently beneficial patient-care. But there will always be cases in which he must choose between the two values, and if he insists upon not choosing between them—not relegating one to a lesser position of value—he will lose the ability to make consistent decisions. He will sometimes act in the support of one and sometimes in the support of the other; sometimes he will experiment on his patients and sometimes not. The attempt to combine two value-standards in a political system must fail for the same reason: Whenever two opposing actions, in support of two differing value-standards present themselves it is necessary to choose between them. If the public good will be served by taxing the middle class to support the poor, and the individual’s good by allowing him to spend his money as he sees fit, the political system can take the individual *or* the public good as its value-standard. It cannot simultaneously do both. In America, it vacillates—sometimes recognizing the rights of the individual and sometimes sacrificing them to the “higher” value. In Russia, the value-standard of the public good is far more consistently applied—with the inevitable consequence of the sacrifice of the individual and the rights that protect him.

The results of the moral code of altruism, regardless what value-standard is chosen as “higher” than man’s life and the rights that make his proper survival possible, have been demonstrated in China and Russia. The results of the attempt to mix altruism and rational selfishness are now apparent in our own country—the unstable mixed economy that results from a mixture of moral codes, the mixed concept of rights which attempts to keep the concept of rights and of liberty without holding man’s life as a *consistent* value-standard, the mixed foreign policy that is the result of the attempt to consistently defend liberty without first defining precisely what it is and what actions it requires. There is only one other alternative to be tried: a return to the political system which was inaugurated with the American Bill of Rights, a return to the economic system of laissez-faire capitalism, and a return to a foreign policy whose purpose is to protect our rights from dangers abroad—but this time with the full knowledge and acknowledgement of the moral code of which it is an expression, the moral code of rational selfishness. Let us examine whether a strict adherence to political rights as the implementation of such a moral code can provide us with a political ideology which will solve our present confusions.

The moral code of rational selfishness acknowledges that mankind's primary tool of survival is his mind; that the proper method of survival for a rational species is rational thought; and that his survival requires his freedom to act on the judgment of his mind. It is for the purpose of implementing this natural right of man that mankind invented political rights: "that all men are created equal . . . with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men . . ." When an individual is faced with force by another man he calls the police and invokes the criminal law; when he is faced with force by the government he invokes the Bill of Rights.

A consistent definition of political rights as freedom from force by any man or group (including the government) results in a very specific concept of political rights. *The right to free speech* guarantees that no man will be silenced by force; it does not obligate him to speak nor to listen; to publish a newspaper nor to buy the one his neighbor publishes. It obligates him in only one way: not to use force to prevent anyone's free speech in any form. A man's right to freedom of speech is absolute; he doesn't lose it if no one listens to him, if he gains a very great following, or if he becomes a broadcaster or a publisher or businessman. This means that even if a town has only one newspaper the publisher may not be compelled to reflect the views of his readers. Whether the readers themselves force him or whether a government bureaucrat does, the result is an infringement of his right to free speech. Government violation of the right to free speech is widely practiced today—particularly in broadcasting, where it is referred to as the public's "right" to unbiased programming. A legitimate right always protects against the use of force; a "right" which initiates force cannot be legitimate. *The right to act* preserves to the individual the widest possible choice of action. For this reason it cannot govern the *results* of his actions: The freedom to act guarantees that any individuals can interact in any way (except by using force); each can buy from, sell or give to the other his labor or any possession. But it does not guarantee that any man *will* do any of these things; an individual has the right to offer his labor on the market but not a right to a job, which would compel another to hire him. Government violation of the right to act is widespread, especially in the economic sphere. For example, a company which succeeds in generating a large volume of sales (a *voluntary* transaction by each buyer) may be accused by the government of violating its competitors' "right" to a fair share of the market. The only way such a "right" can be implemented is by the use of force against the owners of the successful company and the customers who prefer their products. *The right to own property* guarantees the continued possession and right of disposal of whatever a man possesses by purchase, gift, or inheritance. Appropriation of privately-owned wealth to "redistribute" it among others is an example of our government's violation of this right.

Only after acknowledging the nature of individual rights at home is it rationally possible to defend American property rights and lives abroad. Only by recognizing that government's only proper function is to protect man's

rights will we come to an accurate evaluation of any foreign government that systematically denies the rights of its subjects.

Neither the intention nor the resolve to defend liberty was sufficient to create America. The bravery of the American revolutionaries could not have created it. Nor will good intentions, resolution, and courage save it. To save liberty requires the use of the same arduous faculty that created it—the clearest and most rigorous understanding of its nature.

THE MORAL AND THE PRACTICAL

Most people would agree that our society has serious problems today. In politics and economics alone, these problems seem so serious as to threaten our ability to prosper and enjoy our lives. Inflation robs us of our savings and makes it difficult or impossible to plan for the future. The energy crisis is a damper on our high standard of living. Our government seems unable to protect its own representatives in foreign lands. Our economic well-being seems to be at the mercy of Arab dictators, and national and world security seems threatened by an increasingly dangerous Soviet Union.

These problems have existed for some years, and they have only been getting worse. Inflation approaches twenty percent. At the same time, the average citizen is giving an increasingly larger percentage of his income to government. Fuel for all purposes is becoming more dear and difficult to come by. War is becoming more and more of a possibility. Enslavement of young citizens in the military is becoming more likely, and yet our ability to defend our country seems to be fading.

Our government leaders tell us there are no easy solutions to these problems. (Whoever implied a statesman's job was supposed to be "easy"?) What they mean is they don't know what to do. Or worse, they mean it's not their fault: no one could know what to do.

Suppose I were to state the following: one *can* know what to do. These problems do have solutions. And they are known, although not by our government leaders.

If I said that, the reader might be skeptical, but he probably would be intrigued enough to want to hear my solutions, and why I was so sure of them.

Suppose I then stated that the basis for my solutions was morality and the philosophical principles that underlie the proper moral code. Many of you might feel let down, as if you had been cheated. "Oh!" you might think, "I thought he meant *practical* solutions."

The purpose of this paper is not so much to convince the reader that my solutions are right. Rather, I want to show that if it is true that my solutions are the proper moral solutions, then they must be the only practical ones. In other words, the moral and the practical are identical. And therefore, the science of morality, or ethics, holds the answers to our society's fundamental practical problems.

To provide some motivation, let me for the record indicate the essentials of the solution to some of the problems mentioned.¹ To end inflation, the energy crisis, and a stagnant economy in general, the government should end its involvement in the economy. All regulations, including money-supply administration, price controls, licensing, and income-redistribution programs should be eliminated. In other words, our economy should be based on capitalism, the "social system based on the recognition of individual rights, including property rights, in which all property is privately owned."² The only role of

government should be to protect individuals from the initiation of the use of physical force, which is the only way an individual's rights can be violated. Moreover, underlying this solution, men should practice the highest moral virtue: the use of reason.

Some readers might think, "The above solution might be moral, but it is impractical. It may be moral to have an economy free of all government controls, but it would not work. Big companies would raise their prices and would make it impossible for the common people to survive." Others would add, "morality has nothing to do with the real world anyway."

Others would agree that morality and practicality are independent or even at odds, but they would have just the reverse view about what was moral and practical: "Of course, capitalism's free market would be very practical for satisfying material needs of greedy businessmen and even the needs of workers, but it is immoral. It does not recognize the needs of the poor and underprivileged, and it ignores everyone's spiritual duty to sacrifice personal desires for the common good." Even many people who think that a free market economy is both moral and practical (or immoral and impractical) think the agreement is purely a coincidence.

The view that there is a dichotomy between the moral and the practical is more widespread than any particular moral or practical philosophy. What are the sources of this view?

One source is the mind-body dichotomy, which is the view that the mind and body belong to two different worlds or realms. The body is thought to be part of the physical world. But the mind is thought to be of some other spiritual or ideal world. The philosopher Plato, for example, thought the mind was part of a world he called the "world of forms." He thought the physical world was an imperfect reflection of the perfect world of forms.

Carrying this view further, the source of morality is thought to be some part of that spiritual world: either a god, or emotions, or the "soul" of each individual or of some group. The code of morality is thought to be applicable to the spiritual realm of the mind, which is higher, or more noble, than the crude physical world of the body. Adherence to the moral code usually is thought to be good for the spirit. For example, most Christian philosophers held that the moral man's spirit would be rewarded in the spiritual realm of heaven.

Now these philosophers could not help noticing that when men followed these moral codes, their bodies—or, more generally their existence on earth—suffered. (For example, religious missionaries renounced all personal ambitions in order to serve God.) But instead of changing their moral codes, these philosophers concluded that the physical world of man's body was at war with his spirit, constantly tempting him to break his moral code.

One now can see how the moral-practical dichotomy arose. "Practical" means something that works to achieve a specific goal. It implies a goal or a standard by which to judge if something works. This standard of practical action is usually meant to be the well-being of the individual man in the real world that our minds directly perceive, not in some mind-invented

worlds of the above philosophers. And so, “practical” courses of action are in conflict with the mystical moral codes.

A moral code, however, can and should be based on the real world. What, then, is the proper relation between the moral and the practical?

A moral code is “a code of values to guide man’s choices and actions.”³ Just as practicality requires a standard, so does morality. According to the morality of rational self-interest, the proper moral standard is the individual man’s life—in this world, the world that exists. In other words, the standard of morality and the standard of practicality are identical. The reason morality is necessary at all is that simply to want to be practical is not enough to be practical. Wanting food, shelter, clothing, luxuries, a successful career, self-esteem, a rewarding personal life and personal relations, is not enough to obtain these things. One must know how to obtain them. Morality is the theory behind practicality’s practice.

Now let us return to one problem I stated earlier, to see an example of how the moral and the practical go hand in hand.

I stated that capitalism is the moral social system because it recognizes each man’s right to his own life and his right to act according to his own rational judgment. This principle is based on several more fundamental principles, stated briefly in the following argument.

Many alternate values and actions are possible to man. Some will further man’s life, most will harm it. Man has the capacity to know which values will further his life. That capacity is his rational faculty, or reason, which he is free to use if he chooses. Therefore, reason is man’s basic, practical means of survival. However, the only reason available to him is his own. The only way for him to know that his actions are good for his life is if they are the actions he himself chooses by his own rational judgment. Therefore, a political system should ensure that no one uses force against a man to prevent him from acting in accordance with his own rational judgment.

The principles stated in the above moral argument are very abstract. At the same time, they are profound and direct statements about practical reality. If they are true, then any political system that abridged individual freedom of action would be a disaster in practice.

The compelling practical importance of the above argument might be easier to grasp if the argument is examined in a less abstract light. The reader should try to personalize the statements, and ask himself if they apply to his own life. Such an exercise might proceed as follows:

What conditions do I need to be confident of my success in life? Can I live without government subsidies and welfare programs? Could I live if certain individuals or companies chose not to trade with me, or set their terms or prices in such a way that I could not deal with them? Could I survive anyway, just on strength of my own mind and my ability to translate thought into action? Could I still produce what I need to live? Could I plan and save for the future? And could I not expect many other people to be able to survive on their own virtues as well? Could I not persuade at least some of them to

trade their products for mine when it was to our mutual benefit? In short, could I not survive if the only issue to reckon with is my own ability and willingness to deal with reality?

But could I survive if I were not free to act according to my own judgment? Would a government handout today guarantee me more handouts forever? And what of all the handouts I may have to give to others in the future? What of the government regulators that one day may say my activities are legal and the next day say they are not, or the price I planned to charge for my labor is higher than the law allows? Can I save and plan for the future in such an unknowable environment, where the rules are set not by knowable reality or by agreement among men, but rather are set and re-set by our “leaders”? In such an environment, can I plan a career, choose a place to live, plan a family life? Can I survive even in the present, when others decide what percentage of my production I may keep for myself, especially when that percentage is shrinking all the time?

And if I am no longer able to survive by my own effort, can I depend on the support of others? Can I decide for them to be rational, hardworking and productive? Even if they wanted to, how productive could they be in an environment that is unfree and unpredictable? (How productive can the energy industry be today?) And if some of them were still able to be somewhat productive, how much of their production would be handed over to me and not to some others?

In short, is it more practical to live in a free country or a country that is becoming more and more like the Soviet Union?

From the construction of the above questions it should be clear how the author would answer them. However, the reader is not to infer that the answers are obvious or self-evident. It is the task of ethics to answer them. My point is that the answers hinge on the truth or falsehood of the principles stated in the abstract moral argument. In other words, the moral principles and practical conclusions are based on the same premises.

¹ For a full validation of this solution and its basis, the reader should consult the works of Ayn Rand, especially *Atlas Shrugged* and the essays “The Objectivist Ethics” and “Man’s Rights” in *The Virtue of Selfishness*.

² Ayn Rand, “What Is Capitalism,” in *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*, p. 19 (paperback).

³ Ayn Rand, “The Objectivist Ethics” in *The Virtue of Selfishness*, p. 13 (paperback).

RACISM

Despite the pleas and demands of many of today's moral leaders that the phenomena of racism be stopped, it still continues. Why is this so? What are the factors which allow and prompt men to hold and carry out racist policies? Can it be stopped?

A good answer to these questions would begin with a clear, concise definition of racism, for as in the case of most persistent problems, clarity of the involved issues is usually lacking.

Racism is the judging of a man, an assessment of his very character, based upon some particular anatomical trait—usually skin color. It is a view of mankind which asserts that a person acts the way he does because the content of his mind is inherited, and that the nature of this content is reflected by an aspect of his body.

By definition racism is both a form of determinism and collectivism. Supposedly, a person does not decide his own character; his ancestors do this by acting in concert as a giant group, exerting their influence via genetics. Like tribalism, racism holds that a man is what he is, will live, and must be judged accordingly, because his ancestors were whoever they were and did whatever they did. This is the doctrine of innate ideas and leads to such things as “Negro thought,” “the Asian mind,” “white man's ways,” “the Jew in him;” a host of characteristics all determined by the dead and mediated in the live via a man's chromosomes. A typical racist would assert the following, “It's in their genes for them to act like that. He's guilty by birth.”

The question to answer now is whether or not this position is valid; does it, in fact, correctly describe man's nature; is he the collectivized product of his ancestors?

An emphatic *no* is the proper response! Man's nature is such that his defining attribute is the ability to reason—which means that his perceptions of existence may, through the process of thinking, be integrated into concepts. Concepts are the basis of knowledge. Since thinking is volitional, one must choose to have knowledge. Thus, the content of a man's mind is self-determined; it is not inherently derived as claimed by the racists. Each person is responsible for acquiring his own knowledge and acting upon it. A man's character is self-made, and it is independent of his forefathers. Man is an independent entity and has certain fundamental rights by nature: the rights to life, to property, to be judged on the basis of his self-initiated actions.

Doctrines of determinism are irrational at their base; they stand contrary to man as he is known to be. Instead of reason, the racist believes that genes are his primary attribute. Hence, he negates the nature of both the mind and heredity. The evidence that chromosomes determine anatomy is conclusive; but any evidence that character is set by heredity is totally lacking. If it is irrational to stand against nature, then using the racist viewpoint as a basis for judging oneself and others, especially in the context of today's biological knowledge, is worse than irrational—it is immoral.

Irrationality breeds immorality. The results of the two can be seen in any history book or current newspaper. There are wars of racial extermination, such as World War II; there are battles between religious tribes, such as Catholic Ireland versus Protestant England; and as the latest headlines show, the Communist empire of the Soviet Union continues to expand and enslave more of humanity. Will such events ever stop happening? Can the doctrines of determinism be defeated?

Again an emphatic answer is given—but this time it is *yes!* Yes, that is if more men will take the initiative to learn the full nature of the problems confronting society, the most urgent problems.

As stated earlier in this discussion, despite the pleas and urgings of today's moral leaders, racism still continues. Indeed, it would be difficult to find a current newspaper which did not have at least one report in it calling for an end to racial injustice. From the same paper, one can also learn the following: that it is in a man's best interest for the state to tax his salary—to pay for welfare, to subsidize big and small business, to finance mandatory education. Another interesting fact one can read is: that the individual must make whatever sacrifice the state deems necessary, including even that of life. He must, via conscription, be prepared to die for the good of the state.

Obviously these duties are of great significance, and no serious person would take them lightly. Yet, what do they have in common with racism, why are such things mentioned now?

This list of alleged interests is included because the same moral leaders who cry for a cessation of racism also demand that a person sacrifice his life away according to the needs of the state. They assert that one's moral duty is to support the goals of the state; it is immoral to do otherwise. But, what is the state?

It is, unfortunately, the same thing as discussed before—the race, the tribe, only now these things are clothed in the trappings of government.

To understand this point, remember that man is an independent entity, with the right to life, to property, and to be judged on the basis of his self-initiated action. Remember, too, that governments exist in order to secure these rights. Thus, individualism is the guiding principle of a free society. Bearing this in mind, consider the contrary: a slave society.

In a slave society, the guiding principle is collectivism, and in this society the individual has no rights. Man becomes a slave because collectivism negates the very source and purpose of right—man's nature and life. Collectivism, showing its deterministic essence, asserts that a person is primarily genes and innate knowledge expressed in the anatomical form. Since determinism dispenses with the significance of the mind, and since there is no such thing as innate knowledge, collectivism is left with nothing but whim, wish, and mysticism upon which to base a government.

Several questions immediately arise: Whose whim will rule the collectivist society? Whose wish will dictate orders? Whose God will prevail? The answer to all three is—whichever tribe, race, or group that can command the sharpest spear or knife. What will this society be called? Depending upon the

group in power, it will be called many different things, names such as kingdom, empire, The Third Reich, the welfare state. In all cases, the position of individual rights will not change.

Statism, then, is just another deadly variation of determinism; it is a political expression of collectivism. Therefore, when the moral leaders of today call for sacrifice to the state, to any group or anyone, they are, in effect, calling for racism. That is why racism still continues.

A man's chief attribute is his mind, and how he chooses to use it will determine his character. What are the factors in the psychology of the racist that prompt his irrational views? Briefly stated, his main desire is for the unearned. In terms of psychology, the racist seeks a strong self-esteem. However, since he is unable to deal successfully with reality, instead of feeling competent, he feels inferior. Therefore, to gain the much needed self-esteem, the racist clings to a group identity. Within his race he finds much to be proud of but it still is not his own. He is content to fake a high level of esteem by substituting group identity for the psychological reward of personal achievement.

In terms of material wealth, the same is true. However, due to the nature of material goods, unless earned, they have to be stolen. At the lowest level of society, common sneak thieves commit these acts. At the highest level, statist government is the criminal.

To close this presentation, a final point remains to be said on government.

The mind, the faculty of reason, does not work automatically; a man must choose to think. A thought is implemented via action, and in order to be moral, an act has to comply with three criteria: it must be consistent with a man's knowledge of reality, it must sustain or further his life, it cannot violate the rights of other men. In terms of politics, this means establishing a political system that allows man to live as man. Because he has fundamental, inalienable rights—of life and property—it follows that man's government, if it is to be moral, cannot violate these rights. The only political system that follows from man's rights is—laissez-faire Capitalism.

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