

# **Objectivism and Theism**

**By James Kiefer**

A Reply to Nathaniel Branden's Lecture "The Concept of God"  
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## **Part 1: Theism in the Light of Objectivist Principles**

Ladies and gentlemen, in this evening's lecture I propose to consider the relationship between Objectivism and theism. Dr. Nathaniel Branden, in his lecture "The Concept of God," which we are considering tonight, argues that atheism is an essential part of the Objectivist position. I grant that it is a part of the position taken by Miss Rand and by Dr. Branden. But I deny that it follows logically from the basic Objectivist principles about the nature of reality and of man's mind. I maintain, on the contrary, that these principles logically imply the existence of God, and that Miss Rand's atheism (and the same for Dr. Branden's) is an anomaly, a logical flaw in the over-all pattern of her thought.

(I remark parenthetically that I am aware that Dr. Branden is no longer an authorized spokesman for Miss Rand. However, I have heard no complaint that his public statements have misrepresented her philosophy, and in any case, practically all the statements of his that we shall consider were first made, usually in the same words, while he was still her spokesman. I therefore propose to quote the two almost interchangeably. If I thereby attribute to Miss Rand beliefs that she does not hold, I shall be obliged to anyone who will correct me, with supporting evidence.)

I shall begin by stating the positive case for theism as derived from Objectivist principles, and then proceed to an examination of Dr. Branden's arguments for atheism, explaining where I believe that they break down, and why. I do not intend to present arguments for the truth of the Objectivist principles, or to consider the question, "How do you go about presenting the case for theism to a non-Objectivist?" These are worthwhile considerations, but they fall outside the scope of this evening's discussion.

Three basic principles of Objectivism are the following: First, that man is a rational being, a being with a mind, a reason, an intellect, a consciousness. Second, that there exists an objective reality, a world external to and independent of man's consciousness. Third, that man's mind, man's reason, is an adequate and appropriate instrument for the investigation of reality. It is not, of course, claimed that man is either infallible or omniscient, but only that his use of his reason to explore the universe is right in principle, is appropriate to reality.

Now this claim, which is certainly at the very core of Objectivist philosophy, has some far-reaching consequences. You cannot believe in the mind as an adequate instrument unless you hold certain ideas about how that instrument functions. Thus, for example, in the May, 1963 Objectivist Newsletter, and again almost verbatim in his book *The Psychology of Self-Esteem*, Dr. Branden maintains that the Objectivist view of man presupposes free will. Since Dr. Branden's argument for free will is going to be of central importance in tonight's discussion, I quote it at considerable length. The following is from *The Psychology of Self-Esteem*, beginning on paperback page 53:<sup>1</sup>

“Free will” — in the widest meaning of the term — is the doctrine that man is capable of performing actions which are not determined by forces outside his control; that man is capable of making choices which are not necessitated by antecedent factors. As one writer formulates it [quote from Richard Taylor]:

“In the case of an action that is free, it must be such that it is caused by the agent who performs it, but such that no antecedent conditions were sufficient for performing just that action.”

The concept of man as a being of volitional consciousness stands in sharp contrast to the view that dominates our culture in general and the social sciences in particular: the doctrine of psychological determinism.

Psychological determinism denies the existence of any element of freedom or volition in man's consciousness.... It holds that, in any given situation or moment, only one “choice” is

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The title refers to Nathaniel Branden's lecture “The Concept of God,” from his lecture series “The Basic Principles of Objectivism.” That lecture is fully transcribed in his book *The Vision of Ayn Rand*, (Gilbert, Arizona: Cobden Press, 2009), chapter 4. Partial and complete audios seem to be available throughout the Internet. See also R.A. Childs, “The Epistemological Basis of Anarchism,” Note 19 ([http://www.thornwalker.com/ditch/eboa\\_notes.htm#note19](http://www.thornwalker.com/ditch/eboa_notes.htm#note19)).

<sup>1</sup> An excerpt from the Branden lecture itself — containing the essential argument for free will — is available on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xli-N2pnWcM>). The article in *The Objectivist Newsletter* is “The Contradiction of Determinism,” by Nathaniel Branden, pages 17, 19–20. The parallel passage in *The Vision of Ayn Rand* occurs on pages 135–38. The quotation from Richard Taylor occurs in *Metaphysics* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963), page 50.

MMI should perhaps remind the reader that this is a lecture, and James did not provide footnotes as he was speaking. Those hearing the lecture were able to follow it without them, and so also can the reader. These notes are supplied merely in case someone listening to the lecture wishes to be satisfied concerning the fairness of James's presentation of Nathaniel Branden's statements and accuracy in other matters. Moreover, the lecture was originally delivered to an audience that could be expected to recognize various references from *Atlas Shrugged* and the original Branden lecture, whereas the same assumption cannot be extended to readers of this transcript. When there are citations in the body of the text, they occur also in the recording itself.

psychologically possible to man, the inevitable result of all the antecedent determining forces impinging on him, just as only one action is possible to the speck of dust; that man has no actual power of choice, no actual freedom or self-responsibility. Man, according to this view, has no more actual volition than a stone: he is merely confronted with more complex alternatives and is manipulated by more complex forces.

The doctrine of determinism contains a central and insuperable contradiction — an epistemological contradiction — a contradiction implicit in any variety of determinism, whether the alleged determining forces be physical, psychological, environmental or divine.

The determinist view of mind maintains that whether a man thinks or not, whether he takes cognizance of the facts of reality or not, whether he places facts above feelings or feelings above facts — all are determined by forces outside his control; in any given moment or situation, his method of mental functioning is the inevitable product of an endless chain of antecedent factors; he has no choice in the matter.

That which a man does, declare the advocates of determinism, he had to do — that which he believes, he had to believe — if he focuses his mind, he had to — if he evades the effort of focusing, he had to — if he is guided solely by reason, he had to be — if he is ruled instead by feeling or whim, he had to be — he couldn't help it.

But if this were true, no knowledge — no conceptual knowledge — would be possible to man. No theory could claim greater plausibility than any other — including the theory of psychological determinism.

Man is neither omniscient nor infallible. This means (a) that he must work to achieve his knowledge, and (b) that the mere presence of an idea inside his mind does not prove that the idea is true; many ideas may enter a man's mind which are false. But if man believes what he has to believe, if he is not free to test his beliefs against reality and to validate them or reject them — if the actions and content of his mind are determined by factors that may or may not have anything to do with reason, logic, and reality — then he can never know if his conclusions are true or false.

If his capacity to judge is not free, there is no way for a man to distinguish between his beliefs and those of a raving lunatic.

But then how did the advocates of determinism acquire their knowledge? What is its validation? Determinists are conspicuously silent on this point.... They cannot claim to know that their theory is true; they can only report that they feel helpless to believe otherwise. Nor can they claim that their theory is highly probable; they can only acknowledge the inner compulsion that forbids them to doubt that it is highly probable.

Some advocates of determinism, evidently sensing this epistemological dilemma, have sought to escape it by asserting that, although they are determined to believe what they believe, the factor determining them is logic. But by what means do they know this? Their beliefs are no more subject to their control than those of a lunatic. They and the lunatic are equally the pawn of deterministic forces. Both are incapable of judging their judgements.

One of the defining characteristics of psychosis is loss of volitional control over rational judgement — but, according to determinism, that is man's normal, metaphysical state.

There is no escape from determinism's epistemological dilemma....

The very concept of logic is possible only to a volitional consciousness; an automatic consciousness could have no need of it and could not conceive of it....

Only because man is a being of volitional consciousness, only because he is free to initiate and sustain a reasoning process, is conceptual knowledge — in contradistinction to irresistible, unchosen beliefs — possible to him.

Now let us consider the application of this principle, not simply to an individual thought here and there, but to a man's reason considered as a whole. A man has an intellect, a reason, a mind. How did that mind come about? Short of re-incarnation, a theory I believe Dr. Branden does not hold, it will scarcely be maintained that a given individual [human]<sup>2</sup> mind has existed forever. But, as Dr. Branden remarked in this evening's lecture, "All emergences of new entities presuppose the existence of entities that caused

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<sup>2</sup> The material in brackets does not occur in the audio version of this essay, but it does appear in the dot-matrix transcript that Kiefer prepared. Its omission from the audio was accidental.

their emergence.”<sup>3</sup> Now, whatever is caused was brought about by design or by accident. (Throughout this lecture, I shall mean by “design” the occurrence of something as the result of someone’s intending it; and by “accident,” the occurrence of something not as the result of anyone’s intending it.) Is man’s mind the product of accident or design? To understand this question is to see that the answer must be design if man’s mind is to be a suitable instrument for its purpose, the understanding of objective reality. If a mind were brought about simply by the actions of nonconscious entities, then any resemblance between the ideas it formed and the truth would be sheer coincidence.

It may be helpful at this point to introduce an illustrative example. Suppose that a man is lost in the desert and comes across a pointed stick with a couple of wavy parallel lines scratched on it. He asks himself, “How did this stick come to be here?” and makes a guess at the answer. Perhaps he decides that the wavy lines were drawn by someone as a symbol for water and the stick placed there to point the direction to the nearest oasis. If he holds this belief, then it makes sense for him to accept the stick as evidence of the direction of the nearest oasis. On the other hand, perhaps he decides that the stick came there by accident, that it fell from the load of a prospector’s donkey, or was dropped by a nest-building eagle, or whatever, and that the scratches are the gnawings of animals. Now, this is a perfectly reasonable assumption. What is not reasonable is for him to say, “I propose to assume that this stick came here by accident, but I also propose to accept the scratches on it and the direction it points as evidence of the direction of the nearest oasis.” Similarly, a man may believe that his thinking apparatus came about by design, or that it came about by accident, but he may not believe that it came about by accident and simultaneously believe that it provides him with any evidence at all about the nature of reality. Just as anyone who accepts the stick as evidence of the location of the oasis has, whether he realizes it or not, logically committed himself to believing that the stick was placed there by design, i.e., placed by a rational agent for the purpose of providing evidence about the location of the oasis, just so, anyone who accepts the Objectivist view of man’s mind has committed himself, whether he realizes it or not, to believing that man’s mind was designed by a rational agent for the purpose of understanding, of apprehending objective reality. I claim that this rational agent may reasonably be called “God,” a claim that I shall defend later.

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<sup>3</sup> N. Branden, *The Vision of Ayn Rand*, page 101.

Let us now consider several objections that are likely to be raised against this argument.

Some people say: “But why assume more than you need? Why assume that your brain was designed and from this deduce the reliability of your thoughts? Why not simply assume the reliability of your thoughts as an initial premise and go on from there?”

To this we may reply: “But we do start out by believing in the validity of human reason. There is no possibility of starting out anywhere else. You cannot deduce the validity of reason from other premises unless you have already assumed its validity beforehand. The validity of reason is the necessary first assumption of all argument, or rather, is the only context in which talk about arguments, deductions, and assumptions has any meaning. We do not postulate a designer and deduce the validity of reason. We rather ask, in the context of belief in that validity, which is the only context for asking anything, what beliefs about the origin of man’s mind are compatible with that context.”

To this our man may say: “That is quite reasonable of course, but it doesn’t really answer my question. It merely shows that I phrased the question ambiguously. Is the principle that the human mind is an adequate instrument really incompatible with the view that the instrument came about by accident? Consider your stick-in-the-desert illustration. A stick that had fallen by accident could nevertheless point to the oasis. Instead of assuming that the stick was left there to point to the oasis and then following it, why not assume that it accidentally points to the oasis, and then follow it?”

Here we see a confusion between two similar but distinct propositions: (1) that the stick points to the oasis, and (2) that the stick is evidence for the location of the oasis. The first of these is compatible with either accident or design; the second is compatible only with design. If you assume that the stick is there by accident, you may say, “I have no evidence as to which way the oasis lies, but I don’t intend to lie down and die. I will pick a direction at random and start walking. I will, in fact, pick the direction this stick is pointing, which is as good as any other direction.” And this is reasonable. What you cannot do is claim that the stick is evidence. If you have a companion who says, “Instead of taking the direction of the stick, let us take another direction, twenty-eight degrees to the left of that indicated by the stick,” you cannot give any reason for preferring your arbitrarily selected

guess to his. If you follow his suggestion and come to the oasis, it is a marvelously lucky coincidence, but so is it if you follow the line of the stick directly and come to the oasis. But what we believe about our reason is not that it makes lucky guesses about the nature of reality, but that it provides evidence of the nature of reality, that it is a fit instrument for exploring reality. If the lucky-guess hypothesis were tenable, it would be tenable in the context of determinism also. We could assume that the causal chains that determine our thoughts just happen to cause us to think true thoughts. But if this is not an acceptable alternative to the theory of free will, still less is it an acceptable alternative to the theory that our minds have a designer.

Another objection that may be raised is as follows: You have been speaking as if our minds were isolated from the physical universe, as if there were no causal relationship between our minds and reality. If that were so, then one would certainly be hard put to explain how our minds can learn anything about reality without some kind of help, divine help if you like. But in fact, our minds, or at any rate our brains, are clearly part of the interlocking causal network of the world. It is therefore no coincidence if they reflect it, and reflect it accurately at that. You spoke of a stick falling to the ground near an oasis. Now an oasis has no particular causal effect on sticks dropped a mile or so away. But suppose that it were a question of an iron mine and a lodestone dropped by accident. Would it not make sense to accept the lodestone as evidence of the location of the mine? But just as the mine has a causal effect on the lodestone, so the universe has an effect on us.

This sounds promising, but only, I fear, for the moment. It is, of course, perfectly true that the world about us influences us and our thoughts. The question is whether it has any built-in tendency to influence them toward true thoughts. If it does, then Dr. Branden's objection to psychological determinism collapses. And that is not all. Any feeling we may have, for any reason whatever, has the same evidential status as the most careful observation and the most rigorous chain of reasoning. If you have a feeling that a certain long shot is going to win at the races, put your shirt on it. You would not have that feeling if it had not been caused by something which in its turn has some chain of causality connecting it with the horse. Ladies and gentlemen, anyone who upon reflection finds this alternative to theism attractive has disagreements with me, and for that matter with Dr. Branden, which go far beyond the scope of this lecture.

Perhaps the most complex objection we must consider is the Darwinian objection. Someone may say: “There is really no difference between this argument and the old design argument. Writers like Paley used to invite us to consider the eye of the mosquito and ask ourselves whether this marvelously intricate mechanism could have come about by accident. If not, then here we had design, and so a designer. But then Darwin showed us that Natural Selection, although it had no conscious goals, acted in a sense as if it did. Mosquitos have eyes that see efficiently, because the ones that didn’t have died out. Similarly, men have brains that work efficiently, because the ones that didn’t have died out.”

I shall refer to the attempt to account for man’s reason in terms of Natural Selection as Psychological Darwinism.

What the Psychological Darwinist overlooks is that Natural Selection is concerned only with the physical actions of an organism, and that we are concerned in this argument with thoughts, which are not the same thing. Suppose that some foxes are chasing some rabbits. The rabbits that run slower get caught and eaten, while the faster-than-average rabbits [escape and]<sup>4</sup> live and have little rabbits, which are presumably also faster than average. And so a fast-running strain of rabbits is developed. But note that whether a rabbit gets caught depends only on his physical actions, on how fast he moves, how suddenly he dodges, and the like. Whether he gets caught is not at all dependent on whether he feels fear, or whether he realizes what will happen to him if he is caught, or anything of that sort. An intelligent rabbit, or a robot rabbit, so long as they make the same moves, have the same chance of escaping.

One reason why many people find Evolution by Natural Selection an adequate account of the origins of man’s consciousness is that they have consciously accepted, or, more often, been influenced by, the behavioristic approach. For the behaviorist, thinking simply consists of a certain kind of physical behavior. Awareness of danger is deemed to be identical with avoidance behavior, so that if two monkeys both leap for a tree when a tiger approaches, the suggestion that they may not be thinking about the tiger is meaningless. Thinking the tiger dangerous means (to the extent that it means anything) jumping out of the way. Fear and pain mean exhibiting avoidance reactions. Intelligence means exhibiting intelligent behavior, which in its

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<sup>4</sup> See Note 2.

turn may mean anything from stalking game skillfully to checking the right boxes on an I.Q. test. Now, when I say that one of the fundamental principles of Objectivism is that man has a consciousness, a reason, a mind, I assume that it is understood that these words are not being used in a behaviorist sense. Dr. Branden is quite emphatic about what he means by consciousness (quote from *Self-Esteem*, pp. 7–12):

That mental processes are correlated with neural processes in the brain, in no way affects the status of consciousness as a unique and irreducible primary. It is a species of what philosophers term “the reductive fallacy” to assert that mental processes are “nothing but” neural processes — that, for example, the perception of an object is a collection of neural impulses, or that a thought is a certain pattern of brain activity. A perception and the neural processes that mediate it are not identical, nor are a thought and the brain activity that may accompany it. Such an equation is flagrantly anti-empirical and logically absurd....

Radical behaviorism is explicit reductive materialism; it holds that mind is a series of bodily responses, such as muscular and glandular reactions....

Methodological behaviorists may wish to deny that they are reductive materialists. But then, as a minimum, their doctrine entails a belief in another, no more promising version of materialism: epiphenomenalism — the doctrine that consciousness is merely an incidental by-product of physical processes (as smoke is a by-product of a locomotive), and that conscious events have no causal efficacy, neither with regard to bodily events nor to other mental events, i.e., one’s thoughts do not have the power to affect either one’s actions or one’s subsequent thoughts.

The behaviorist has been conspicuously reluctant to enunciate the conclusions to which his theory leads. He has not, for instance, felt obliged to declare: “Since phenomena of consciousness are illusory or irrelevant to explanations of behavior, and since this includes my behavior, nothing that I may think, understand, or perceive (whatever these terms mean) bears any causal relation to the things I do or the theories I advocate.”

When a person puts forth a doctrine which amounts to the assertion either that he is not conscious or that it makes no

difference to him (and should make no difference to others) whether he is conscious or not — the irresistible temptation is to agree with him.

At least in Objectivist circles, one would not expect to find many avowed behaviorists, but when a certain assumption, largely unspoken, pervades much of contemporary writing, many people who do not explicitly accept it may be influenced by it. I believe that the influence of behaviorism is chiefly responsible for the willingness of many people to accept a Psychological Darwinian account of the origins of the mind.

If we distinguish clearly between thoughts and physical actions, we see at once that there is no reason why Natural Selection should be expected to produce thoughts at all, let alone true thoughts.

We may put it this way. Let us suppose that among our remote ancestors there were two kinds of monkeys. Some were conscious and aware of what went on around them, while others had no consciousness at all, were simply complicated physical objects. Again, in each group, some had behavior patterns, based either on reason or on reflexes, which caused them to jump for a tree when a tiger came near. Thus we have aware and jumping monkeys, aware and non-jumping monkeys, non-aware and jumping monkeys, and non-aware and non-jumping monkeys. Natural Selection discriminates between the jumpers and the non-jumpers, eliminating the latter, but makes no distinction at all between the aware and the non-aware. We have the four types arranged, so to speak, in two rows and two columns, but we are interested for our present purposes in the difference between the rows, while Natural Selection is relevant only to the difference between the columns, and, hence, irrelevant to our present concern.

But, it may be argued, surely it is more useful to have true beliefs about the world than false ones, or no beliefs at all.

To this I reply: Not always. I can walk the length of a narrow plank on the ground much more easily than I can an equally narrow one several feet off the ground. If I had to walk a plank over a canyon, my chances of success would be considerably increased by an optical illusion that made the floor of the canyon seem to be only a few inches below the plank. And there are many like me. There is no logical necessity for useful action to be based

on true beliefs. If you set out to design a monkey that will jump out of the way of a tiger, there are at least four ways you can do it:

- (1) Mind controlling and informed.
- (2) Mind controlling but deceived.
- (3) Mind non-controlling.
- (4) Mind non-existent.

(1) Mind controlling and informed: You can give the monkey a mind, and a will, and a system of values that includes a value for its own survival and a consequent unwillingness to tangle with a tiger, and a mind-body relationship such that sense data are transmitted accurately from his body to his mind, and decisions about action are transmitted accurately from his mind to his body. Presumably we ourselves are examples of this sort of arrangement.

(2) Mind controlling but deceived: You can give the monkey a mind, and have it directing the activities of the body, but deceived about what it is doing. Here is an example: During the Second World War, the psychologist B.F. Skinner developed a missile-guidance system that used pigeons. The birds were given, say, an aerial photograph of downtown Berlin and trained to peck at the Brandenburg Gate, being rewarded with grain when they did so. Then they were put into a missile aimed in the general direction of Berlin. A camera in the nose of the missile threw a picture on a screen. When Berlin appeared on the screen, the pigeons pecked at the picture of the Brandenburg Gate. If the missile was headed straight for the gate, the pigeons pecked the center of the screen and the missile maintained course. If the missile was off course, the pigeons pecked to one side, and various devices transmitted this imbalance to the steering mechanism of the missile, which corrected the course. Result: Bullseye! I am told that the device worked fairly well in practice runs, but that the war ended before Eisenhower got around to turning Skinner loose on the Brandenburg Gate. If we suppose that the pigeons were probably in some rudimentary sense thinking, but not thinking about hitting the Brandenburg Gate, just about getting their dinner, then we have an example of Method Two.

(3) Mind non-controlling: You can give the monkey a mind, but with no connection at all between mind and body, so that the mind is hallucinating about something, while the body carries on, on its own. We are examples of this, too, in some instances. When you step barefooted on a hot surface, first

your nervous system generates a muscular reaction that jerks your foot back, and then you feel pain, and then you realize what has happened and form the intellectual judgement that moving your foot was a good idea. But if your physical response had been dependent on your making a rational judgement that avoiding the hot surface was an action conducive to survival, and not merely to survival as an organism but to survival in the manner appropriate to man's nature as a rational being, your foot would have been pretty badly burned. In this instance, at least, we see that the approach whereby the body survives because it is physically programmed with the right stimulus-response patterns to survive, and the mind does not enter the situation at all until later, is actually more efficient than the use of the mind as a tool of survival.

(4) Mind non-existent: You can give the monkey no mind at all, and have him avoid tigers because his nervous system is programmed to do so. An example of this would be the activities of, say, insects, who carry on some very elaborate activities, apparently simply because they are wired to do so. Computers and electronic guidance systems are perhaps even better examples.

Now, if you are simply interested in getting certain physical behavior from the organism, any one of these four ways will do, and the survival of an organism depends on its physical behavior, not on its thoughts, except insofar as these affect the physical behavior.

The theory that man's reason, man's consciousness, developed as the result of Natural Selection takes it as self-evident that the ability to reason is conducive to man's survival as a species. But is it? Undoubtedly the Industrial Revolution, the growth of modern science, the whole Western intellectual tradition from Aristotle down, has been a great blessing to mankind. But it is another question whether it has been precisely the sort of blessing that Psychological Darwinism requires. Where Natural Selection is concerned, it does not in the least matter whether the individual members of a species are happy, or wise, or just, or well-fed, or even long-lived. The only question is whether the species survives. And the human species, precisely because its members have minds, has a significant chance of not surviving for another century. I am not joining the ranks of those who wish to repeal the Industrial Revolution, [calling for a moratorium on scientific

research,]<sup>5</sup> when I point out that we may blow ourselves up with atomic weapons or poison ourselves with some exotic new chemical (or prosaic old one). On the other hand, there is no species of monkey or ape that I know of that is in serious danger (or would be in serious danger if it were not for man) of becoming extinct in the next hundred years. If you are concerned, as I assume we all are, with the quality of human life, then having the sort of minds that can invent nuclear weapons is worth the risk of being blown up with nuclear weapons. But if Nature, being indifferent to the quality of life and concerned only with quantity, developed rational faculties in some primate two million years ago in order to increase the chances that organisms descended from that primate might still be around 2.1 million years later, then it must be concluded that Nature erred.

Someone may say: “But the dangers to the species that you refer to are not dangers that come from man’s rationality. They come from his irrationality. We need more rationality, not less. If people would only listen to Ayn Rand, would institute laissez-faire societies everywhere, with a concept of property rights that kept one man from polluting another man’s stream without permission, there would be no danger from fallout or pollution or anything else.”

This objection confuses two different uses of the word “rational.” We may say that man is a rational animal, meaning that, unlike the beasts, he possesses a mind. Or we may say that a certain man is being rational, meaning that he is using his mind, that he is choosing to think, that he is, as Dr. Branden would say, focusing on his problems instead of blanking out. Now, given that a man has a mind, if anyone wishes to maintain that he promotes his own chances of survival, and also the collective chances of the species, by habitually choosing to think clearly, I have no objection. But notice that this is a question of free will, of his choosing to think. You cannot, by Natural Selection or any other way, breed a race of men whose genes determine that they will always, or usually, freely choose to think clearly. You cannot determine anyone to do anything freely.

As for the other sense of rationality, the simple possession of the faculty of consciousness, apart from how the user chooses to use it, there is no ready refutation of the evolutionary biologist who says, simply, “Consciousness is a lethal mutation.”

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<sup>5</sup> See Note 2.

Someone may object: “But atomic bombs and the like are a very recent danger. Man’s mind evolved over millions of years. During most of those years, it was an advantage to him, in the crude sense of being conducive to the survival of the species. If it has lately become a disadvantage to him, that is irrelevant to the overall picture.”

Let us meet that argument on its own ground. Atheism is a philosophical theory, and those who propound it suppose that men are equipped to philosophize. Psychological Darwinism tells us that we can trust a man’s reasoning on questions of philosophy because his brain is the product of years of Evolution by Natural Selection, during which Nature shaped that brain into a tool suitable for producing survival-conducive behavior in a primitive environment. The tacit premise is that a tool suitable for producing such behavior is a tool suitable for producing sound philosophical theories, and that the more suitable a given brain is for the one purpose, the more suitable for the other. Now if this be so, then no one should be given a degree in philosophy without passing a Wilderness Survival Test. Disputes between rival philosophical positions should be settled by taking a representative of each (physically matched as far as possible), dropping them without tools or supplies in the middle of the Australian Outback, and seeing who reaches Sydney first. And of course, the reproductive aspect must not be ignored. To a population geneticist, an individual that lives in excellent health to a ripe old age and dies without leaving offspring might as well have died in infancy. Either way, he is a complete genetic failure and, according to Psychological Darwinism, a complete epistemological failure as well. To an Objectivist who is also a Psychological Darwinist, I say: “Evaluate the following statement. The best measure we have of any philosopher’s competence — including Miss Rand — is the size of that philosopher’s family. If you mark that statement true, you have repudiated Objectivism. If you mark it false, you have repudiated Psychological Darwinism.”

You can’t have both.

I suspect that, no matter how many disclaimers I offer, nothing will prevent some of my listeners from seizing on these remarks and saying, “Aha! The theist is showing his true colors by disparaging reason!” One more disclaimer. I am not disparaging reason. I am saying that its function is not to enable men to survive as organisms, but to survive in the manner

appropriate to men. But survival as organisms is all that is relevant to Natural Selection.

Anyone who accepts Psychological Darwinism is saying, in effect, “The only important, the only significant characteristic of true thoughts, as opposed to false ones, is that they lead to actions that are conducive to survival. A monkey that gets out of the way of a tiger, a monkey that survives, has passed the only intelligence test that matters. As for the suggestion that his thoughts may be erroneous even though his actions are useful, such worries are either meaningless or irrelevant.” In the words of Dr. Branden, already quoted:

“When a person puts forth a doctrine which amounts to the assertion either that he is not conscious or that it makes no difference to him (and should make no difference to others) whether he is conscious or not — the irresistible temptation is to agree with him.”

And this is where all forms of Psychological Darwinism, at least in an Objectivist context, get into trouble. If any professed Objectivist undertakes to explain the origin of man’s mind by Natural Selection, the first question I have for him is: “Do you accept as sound Dr. Branden’s analysis of the epistemological self-contradictions of determinism? If you do, please re-read his analysis and explain to me how your Psychological Darwinism escapes being vulnerable to a parallel analysis. If you do not accept Dr. Branden’s analysis, then you are in the wrong meeting. I have undertaken to show that the fundamental principles of Objectivism logically imply the existence of God. Defending those fundamental principles is not in my contract for this evening.”

To my Objectivist and semi-Objectivist listeners, I say: The more carefully and thoroughly you consider Psychological Darwinism, the more obvious will become its utter, complete, and fundamental incompatibility with Objectivism.

Again and again, in *Atlas Shrugged* and elsewhere, Miss Rand emphasizes the fact that you cannot get positive results by pointing a gun at a man’s head and ordering him to think. But the Psychological Darwinists tell us that you can get positive results. They believe that Nature has done just this, and that all reasoning, all thought whatever, is the result of Nature’s

having pointed a gun (or a tiger) at our remote ancestors and ordered them to think.

Further comment seems needless.

Now I come to two objections to the Epistemological Proof, or, as I prefer to call it, the Objectivist Proof, of the Existence of God, which I suspect have been in the minds of many of you since I began to present it. The first is: "If God made my mind, then who made God's mind? Did His mind come about by accident or design? If by accident, then His thoughts are not evidence of the nature of reality, and by derivation neither are mine. If by design, then you have merely put the problem back one more stage. Are you going to ask us to believe in an infinite series of Gods, each created by the previous one?"

In fact, this is not the line I intend to take. I cannot see that an infinite chain of Gods provides us with any help. Suppose I tell you that there is intelligent life on Mars, and you ask me how I know, and I answer, "I heard it from my professor." You then ask me how my professor knows, and I say, "He heard it from his professor." Further questions establish that I am supposing this information to have been passed down from professor to student an infinite number of times. Now quite apart from your doubts that professors have been around quite that long, I think you would find this an insufficient reason for accepting the statement about Mars. You would say that a false statement can travel down an infinite chain just as readily as a true one, and that if each professor is simply passing on, uncritically, what was told to him, then we have no grounds for supposing the statement to be true. I agree. The same thing applies if we suppose that there is one professor who has lived an infinite time and has always known that there is life on Mars. Only a habitual respect for the wisdom of age hinders us from seeing at once that an infinitely old professor could have been wrong all his life just as easily as right all his life.

It would thus seem that we have reached a dead end. An infinite series does not help, and a finite series leaves us with a problem about the origin of the mind of the top God which is just as pressing as the problem about the origins of our own minds. Was the first mind created by accident or design?

However, there is one context in which the problem does not arise. One thing about which I am never mistaken, about which it is impossible for me

to be mistaken, is my sense data at this moment. If someone tells me that there is not really a bug biting the back of my neck, it just feels as if there is, I grant that he may be right. But if he tells me that I am not really experiencing discomfort, it just feels as if I am, then I know he is wrong. If pain is an illusion, it is a painful illusion. The man who says, "I see an elephant in the shrubbery," is probably wrong. A man who says, "I see red spots in front of my eyes," may possibly be lying, but he is not mistaken. If he thinks he sees red spots, then he is seeing red spots. Period. To say, "Jones feels a tickling sensation," and to say, "Jones seems to himself to feel a tickling sensation," is to say the same thing twice in different words.

Now, I maintain that the only hypothesis about the origin of our minds that is consistent with Objectivist principles is that they were designed, either directly or at several removes, by an Ultimate Designer whose mind is related to the whole of reality as our minds are to our own sense data. Thus, His judgements about reality are always correct, and there is no need to account for that correctness, any more than there is any need to account for the fact that the number six is such an amazingly close approximation to the number six. It is not just that he is always right. That would be ordinary run-of-the-mill omniscience. What is at stake here is logical or necessary omniscience. To say, "Such-and-such is true," and, "The Ultimate Designer believes that such-and-such is true," is to say the same thing twice in different words.

When I started to plan this speech, I made an outline of what in general I wanted to say, and then by expanding some parts of the outline into a verbatim transcript, made an estimate of how long the speech would be. The first estimate was eighteen hours. You will be glad to know that I have made some cuts. One of the things that went was practically everything about ethics. About all I have to say at this point is that when we talk about man's reason as a suitable instrument for perceiving the nature of reality, this includes perceiving the moral nature of reality. Just as we have seen that God is necessarily omniscient, so that the statements "p is true" and "God believes that p is true" are really the same thing said in different words, so the statements "x is good" and "God believes that x is good" are synonyms. We express this by saying that God is normative, meaning that he is the standard of value.

Now to say, "Jones believes such-and-such," and, "Jones believed such-and-such yesterday," is not to say the same thing in different words. Jones may

have changed his mind between yesterday and today. Jones is a being with a history. Jones is subject to change. Jones has duration — is spread out in time. If we suppose that the Ultimate Designer is similarly spread out in time, we run into intolerable difficulties. If today he remembers that Napoleon died at St. Helena, but tomorrow forgets this, will the statement that Napoleon died at St. Helena, although true today, become false tomorrow? We are forced to conclude that the Ultimate Designer, whom I will hereafter call God for short, does not have duration. I remind you of Dr. Branden's remark in this evening's lecture: "Time is in the universe; the universe is not in time."<sup>6</sup> Time and space are not some huge container into which all of reality, every material object, every mind, every entity, must be fitted. They are the network of spatial and temporal relationships that exist among things in this world. A writer, in writing a novel, creates not only characters and events but also their relationships to one another, spatial, temporal, causal, personal. But the framework of the novel, with all the pieces that that framework holds together, is in the mind of the author. The mind of the author is not in that framework. The writer, unlike God, does have duration, but not duration in the time-series of the book. One does not ask, "How old was Dagny Taggart when Ayn Rand first got the idea for Atlas Shrugged?"

I spoke a few minutes ago of two objections to the theist conclusion, and it is now time to consider the second: the existence of evil. In our present context, where God is being considered primarily as the ground of truth and of man's ability to grasp it, the problem is most immediately one of the existence of error. If God has designed our minds to enable us to learn the truth, why is it that our minds sometimes make mistakes?

This question is particularly apposite when directed to those who suppose that if the world is dependent on God for its existence, then the world must in some sense be God, that "God" is simply another name for the Universe itself, the sum total of reality, looked at in a religious way. This view is called "pantheism." Those who take it say that all my thoughts are really God's thoughts, an aspect of the Divine Mind, and that all my actions are really God's actions, an aspect of the Divine Activity. This puts them in the position of maintaining either that there is no such thing as a false thought, or a wrong action, or else that the distinction between right and wrong, between true and false, is of no importance on the Divine level. And

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<sup>6</sup> *The Vision of Ayn Rand*, page 102.

that, I submit, is an adequate refutation of pantheism. A sound account of man's mind must account both for knowledge and for error. Atheism leaves no room for the possibility of knowledge; pantheism leaves no room for the possibility of error. Only theism, the belief that we are created by God but distinct from God, accounts for both.

But, it may be asked, how does theism account for error. Given that my mind and God's mind are not identical, if He designed my mind, oughtn't He to have done a better job of it?

This is a special case of the objection: if God is both all-good and all-powerful, why is there evil in the world?

Now, you will note that this objection can be raised only against someone who has asserted both the goodness and the omnipotence of God. I have mentioned God's goodness only parenthetically, and have made no attempt whatever to prove His omnipotence. This is not simply a tactical device on my part to deprive objectors of a convenient statement to pounce on. I do not at present see that the omnipotence of God can be proved from Objectivist principles. As far as I can see, an Objectivist is perfectly free to deny it and still remain a good, sound, rational disciple of Miss Rand. It is necessary to suppose that God is sufficiently interested in us to care whether we think correctly or not, and that he has considerable influence over the forces that brought us about, otherwise our cognitive apparatus would not be a suitable instrument. But it is not necessary to suppose anything much stronger than that. What, you may ask, does not His position as the Being in Whose mind everything is going on make Him absolute master of the situation? Not necessarily. It makes everything absolutely dependent on Him, in that if He did not exist neither would anything else. But it does not follow that it is absolutely dependent on His will. My toothache is dependent on me, in that if I did not exist then neither would my toothache. But it is not the case that if I did not want my toothache to exist then it would not exist. In any case, we see that once we have established the existence of a being with some of the attributes of God, such as that the whole of reality exists only because he exists, and that he is omniscient and normative and timeless, the objections such as the problem of evil have weight only as objections to the thesis that he is omnipotent, not to the thesis that there is such a being at all. But more of this when we get to Dr. Branden's comments on the Problem of Evil.

Just for the record and to avoid misunderstanding, let me state that if I do not undertake to prove a particular proposition tonight, it does not mean that I do not believe it or that I think there is no evidence for it. Sometimes it may mean that, but sometimes it will mean simply that I do not think it follows straightforwardly from basic Objectivist principles, or that it is outside the scope of this lecture.

In summary, then, to be an Objectivist means to accept, among other things, the assertion that there is an external reality, and that man's mind, man's reason, is an instrument adequate and appropriate to the investigation of that reality. But this assertion is meaningful only in the context of beliefs about the nature and origins of man's mind which are consistent with that assertion. The dropping of that context renders the affirmation of confidence in man's mind meaningless. In the first lecture of this series, Dr. Branden spoke at length about the fallacy of the stolen concept,<sup>7</sup> the attempt so frequently made by anti-rational philosophers to utilize a concept outside the rational framework which alone renders that concept tenable. Ladies and gentlemen, the atheist who, while remaining an atheist, undertakes to accept the fundamental principles of Objectivism, and to reason therefrom, provides us with a classic example, a textbook example, of the fallacy of the stolen concept.

## **Part 2: Dr. Branden's Case against Theism Examined**

I promised at the beginning of Part 1 that, after presenting the positive case for theism on Objectivist grounds, I would examine Dr. Branden's arguments and state where, in my judgement, he goes astray. To this task I now turn.

Dr. Branden begins by contrasting Faith with Reason, and complaining because Theists rely on Faith, whereas Objectivists regard Reason as the sole basis of belief.<sup>8</sup> His complaint seems to be that people ask him to believe in God, and when he asks, "Why should I? On what grounds?" they

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<sup>7</sup> Actually the discussion was in the second lecture, and is found on pp. 45ff. in N. Branden, *The Vision of Ayn Rand*. See also N. Branden, "The Stolen Concept," *The Objectivist Newsletter*, January 1963, pp. 2, 4.

<sup>8</sup> *The Vision of Ayn Rand*, pages 93ff.

answer, “Don’t argue about it. Don’t ask questions. Don’t think. Just believe.”

If it is a lack of argument that he is complaining about, then I have done my best to remedy the deficiency, and I am scarcely the first person to have done so. The fact that the average theist cannot argue the point very well does not prove that theism is irrational. The average college student cannot give cogent arguments for supposing that the earth moves, but Dr. Branden would not call post-Ptolemaic astronomy irrational.

Nevertheless it must be granted that theists, most notably Christians, do talk about the importance of Faith. Are they urging the importance of Unreason?

The word “Faith” is used in several senses, and in replying to Dr. Branden’s charge it is necessary to sort some of them out.

(1) First, “Faith” is sometimes used to mean the faculty by which we grasp fundamental postulates or premises of Reason, such as that A is A. Dr. Branden, in an earlier lecture of this series, denounces as subversive of all rationality the doctrine that believing the postulates is an act of faith.<sup>9</sup> But I believe that the problem is sometimes one of terminology. The problem is that the word “Reason” is being used in two senses, rather as “New York” may mean either the borough, the city, or the state. “Ratio,” or “Reason,” is used by Thomas Aquinas to refer either to the Rational Soul, or to all the activities proper to the Rational Soul, or to that particular activity which we may call deduction. In the following passage he uses “Ratio” in the narrow sense, and distinguishes it from “Intellectus,” or intellect (*Summa Theologiae*, Part 1, Question 79, Article 8):

“Intellect is the simple (i.e., indivisible, uncompounded) grasp of an intelligible truth, whereas reasoning is the progression toward an intelligible truth by going from one understood point to another. The difference between them is thus like the difference between rest and motion or between possession and acquisition.” Dr. Samuel Johnson’s Dictionary similarly defines “Reason” in the narrower sense, calling it “The power by which man deduces one proposition from another, or proceeds from premises to consequences.”

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<sup>9</sup> *The Vision of Ayn Rand*, page 90.

In most philosophic usage today, the word “Reason” is restricted to its narrower sense, to mean logical deduction of conclusions from premises. Now when it is so restricted, it is clear that we need another word to describe the process by which we come to accept the premises, or, if we cannot remember a time when we did not hold the premises, our grounds for confidence in them when challenged. To say that, although we arrive at the theorems in geometry by reasoning, we do not accept the postulates on the basis of reason is simply to say that the postulates are not theorems, that premises are not conclusions, that the earliest statements in a proof are not preceded by still earlier statements. Aquinas would have expressed this by saying that we know the Theorem of Pythagoras by Reason, but grasp by Intellect the truth that things equal to the same thing are equal to each other. Modern writers do not use the term “Intellect” here, unless they are avowed disciples of Aquinas. They will say “intuition,” or “instinct,” or “faith.” Now sometimes they do mean that accepting the postulates is not an intellectual matter at all. But quite often they mean simply that the postulates are not arrived at by reason in the narrow sense. Comes now Miss Rand, using “Reason” in the broader sense, to include what Aquinas called “Intellect.” The result is that Miss Rand seems to be believing on the basis of reason what others believe on the basis of intuition, instinct, or faith. But before concluding that the difference between Miss Rand and her opponent on this point is substantive rather than terminological, we must find out, if we can, what her opponent means by “intuition,” or whatever term he uses.

Sometimes her opponent will boldly declare that he accepts the postulates, not because he has any rational grounds for doing so, but because he chooses to do so, by a mere arbitrary act of will. Even here, we must take care lest we misunderstand him. In mathematics, for example, we are almost always concerned with deducing conclusions from arbitrarily adopted premises. We say, “Let  $G$  be a finite abelian group, subject to the restriction that ...” and go on from there. On a more elementary level your second-grade teacher used to say to you things like, “Farmer Brown had twenty-three chickens and eight of them died. How many were left alive?” If you had asked her, “Where did you get that story about Farmer Brown and how do you know that it’s true?” her response would have been that she was making an arbitrary assumption and asking you to consider its consequences. If you had denounced the making of arbitrary assumptions as anti-rational, the atmosphere might have waxed unpleasant. Often, of course, the mathematician will be working from premises that he thinks true. But even

when he cares whether Farmer Brown's chickens are really dead, he will not call looking at them a logical or mathematical activity.

Even when someone says, "My belief that A is A is an act of the will, an arbitrary choice on my part," he may mean, "I choose to think, to be rational, to be sane, although the option of lunacy is open to me, and to every other being of volitional consciousness." So much for faith in the first sense.

(2) "Faith" is sometimes used to mean the adherence to reason as against feeling. Let me give an example. I know of a certain physics teacher who once began a lecture by writing on the board in foot-high letters the words, **FAITH IN PHYSICS!** The students had been studying elementary mechanics, and all knew that a pendulum bob released from rest at a given height will not swing to a greater height, and could explain why this is so in terms of potential and kinetic energy, and so forth. Now he asked one student to explain this principle to the class, and the student did. Then the professor asked him, "Do you believe all that stuff you just spouted about the pendulum? Are you sure it's true?" The student answered, "Yes, of course!" The professor then unveiled the apparatus for the day, a large pendulum hanging from the ceiling with an axe-head at the bottom. He stood the student up at one side of the room, pulled the axe up so that the blade just touched his chin, and released it. The blade swung across to the other side of the room, and back again, just barely caressing the student's chin. "There, now," chuckled the professor. "That's one physics lesson you won't forget in a hurry!"

You will perhaps agree that it would not have been surprising if the student had been a bit nervous, or even panicked and dodged as he saw the blade coming toward him. In such a situation, it is very easy to lose faith in physics. But it would not have been reason that took away his faith. The battle is between reason and faith on one side and emotion and imagination on the other.

Now if a man has come to believe in God, there will almost certainly be times when he is in a disbelieving mood. He may be feeling depressed or frustrated, and the world seems so squalid and meaningless that the arguments for belief in God seem abstract and irrelevant. Or he may feel a strong urge to do something that his religious code forbids, or otherwise find that it would be very convenient if his religious beliefs were not true, and so

may be disposed to regard them as false, or more probably, to avoid thinking about them.

In this and similar contexts, Christians are accustomed to call the practice of being guided by intellect rather than emotion the virtue of Faith.

(3) “Faith” is sometimes used to mean gambling on a proposition. For most things, the evidence available to us is less than conclusive. Suppose you are ill and the doctor recommends an operation, but says, “I cannot guarantee that it will improve your condition. It may even worsen it.”

In this context, you cannot know with certainty or anything approaching it whether you will be better off with the surgery or without it. But once you and the doctor have chosen a course of action, you must act as firmly and decisively as if you were absolutely sure that the choice was the correct one. And so with a good many ventures. You undertake the venture with less than certainty that it is sound, but having undertaken it, proceed as if you knew it to be sound, since anything short of that will certainly be pointless.

(4) “Faith” may be used to mean trust in a person, trust going, in a sense, beyond the evidence. Let us consider the situation of a young man who is heir to a vast fortune. He meets a number of young women, and finds them very attractive and agreeable. But he is not sure whether they like *him*, or merely want to get their hands on his money. He dislikes the idea of losing half his wealth after a six-month marriage, and dislikes even more the idea of being had for a chump. No matter how affectionate and sincere a woman may seem, he can never be sure that she is not thinking in terms of alimony and a community-property settlement. So he may resolve never to fall in love. On the other hand, he may say, “I know that I am taking a risk. To love is to be vulnerable. I cannot fall in love without the chance of being very badly hurt. But I am willing to take that chance. I prefer it to the alternative of a loveless existence.”

Not everyone will find that a reasonable choice. There are people whose greatest satisfaction is being able to say, “Nobody ever puts anything over on me. Nobody ever bluffs me out at poker. I call the hand every time. Nobody will ever con me, make me a sucker, induce me into an unmerited trust, play me for a fool.” Such a man will die a bachelor and friendless. He will probably also have lost quite a bit at poker. But he has what he says he wants.

Incidentally, if somewhere along the line our man — the one who is never conned — *has* gotten married, he will be a jealous husband. It is a matter of plain experience that, if you start looking for indications that your spouse might be up to something, you will almost certainly find them. And once again, you can choose. When you find a couple of ticket stubs lying around, you can refuse to rest until you know exactly who used them. Your spouse, if reasonable, will probably explain in detail, with corroborative evidence, the first few times something looks fishy, but if your suspiciousness gets out of hand, may very well end up saying: “No, I will *not* tell you where I went for lunch today. Either we have a relationship of trust, or we don’t. If you trust me, then you don’t need to know. If you don’t, then nothing short of a full-time detective on my trail would satisfy you, and even then you would begin to suspect the detective of taking bribes. We can’t afford a detective, and in any case a marriage preserved on that basis is a marriage destroyed. So, make up your mind whether you will trust me without proof, and then we will know where we stand.”

Unfortunately, that is precisely what a guilty spouse, if clever, would say. When you decide to trust someone, you risk betrayal. You can’t have it both ways. A warrior, or a mountaineer, cannot be both very brave and very safe. If you are a Christian, you will be asked to put your trust in God. When, from time to time, it looks as if God is double-crossing you, you will be asked to do the equivalent of glancing at a couple of unexplained ticket stubs, tossing them into the waste-paper basket, and forgetting them. Whether you think that reasonable is, in a way, a matter of taste. Which do you dread more: Finding out that a friend whom you trusted has betrayed you, or finding out that a friend who you thought had betrayed you, and from whom you accordingly parted in anger years ago, was innocent after all? There is risk either way.

(5) A fifth use of the word “Faith” is in the phrase, “Justification by Faith,” used by Dr. Martin Luther and others. Here, what is meant is (very roughly) recognizing and facing up to the fact that you can never put God in the position of owing you a favor. Any further discussion of this doctrine is likely to get technical, and I hereby beg off.

This reminds me of something I should have said much earlier. When I speak of being a theist, I mean accepting the proposition that the Ultimate Designer, as heretofore described, exists. This leaves the question: “Shall I become (a) a Jew? (b) a Christian? (c) a Moslem? (d) none of the above?”

still very much open. And I am not trying to answer it, at least not tonight. I have brought up the subject of Christianity because of Dr. Branden's references to the distressing intellectual habits of theists. This has to be dealt with in terms of examples, and the Christian examples are the ones I know best. In case anyone is curious, I am myself a Christian, an orthodox, tradition-minded, High Church Episcopalian, and capable on occasion of being downright stuffy about it.

Dr. Branden's opening attack on the concept of God is worth examining in some detail. He speaks as follows: "God," claim the mystics, "is infinite. What does it mean to be infinite? It means to possess no limits, to possess no specific, determinate, finite number of attributes, no specific particular identifiable qualities. It means to be nothing in particular. But to be nothing in particular is — not to be."<sup>10</sup>

I maintain that atheism is essentially a foreign intrusion into Objectivist thought, and that therefore when Dr. Branden is defending atheism, he does not do so with his usual lucidity. By way of illustration, I ask you to consider what would result if he were to apply to Objectivism the same sort of criticism that he is prepared to use against theism. Let us construct an imaginary quotation for him [imaginary quote]:

Ladies and gentlemen, let us consider the first principle of Objectivism, that Existence Exists. Existence, also called "Reality" or "the Universe," is the sum of all existing entities, the total of all that is. This means of all material entities — "non-material" means "non-anything you know." Since a combination of material entities is itself a material entity, we see that the universe is a material object. Now the first questions one asks about a material object are: "What shape is it? How big is it? Where is it?"

Now the universe has no shape. To have a shape it must have boundaries, a surface. But the universe does not.

The universe has no size. To call it infinitely large is not to specify a size, but simply to call it — larger than any size we know or can conceive. To call it finite but unbounded, limited but unlimited — as some physicists do — is no help, even assuming that it can be made to mean something. The one length a

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<sup>10</sup> *The Vision of Ayn Rand*, pages 95–96.

yardstick cannot measure its own length. You cannot specify the size of an object in terms of itself, or any part of itself. It is not informative to be told that the length of a piece of string is twice the distance from the center to one end. The only way to measure the universe is to set a yardstick beside it that is not part of the universe. But there is no such yardstick.

Finally and most crucially, the universe has no location. It makes no sense to ask, “Where is the universe?” If someone were to say, “Last night the entire universe was moved sideways ten miles,” a natural response would be to look puzzled and ask, “Ten miles toward what?” To specify the location of anything is to describe its spatial relations to adjacent objects. But there are no objects adjacent to the universe. Space is in the universe; the universe is not in Space.

We are asked, then, to consider a material object having no shape in particular, no size in particular, and existing nowhere in particular, not in Space. But for a material object, to be nowhere in particular, to be not in Space, is — not to be! We thus see that the fundamental principle of Objectivism, that Existence Exists, is utterly false, unintelligible, and an insult to man’s reason!  
[close imaginary quote]

The application of Dr. Branden’s atheological style to an Objectivist topic furnishes a striking example of the principle that the Objectivist who sets out to deny theism ends up denying Objectivism in the process.

Next, Dr. Branden attacks the assertion that God is pure spirit.<sup>11</sup> In this context, he says, “spirit” means non-matter, that is, non-anything you know. I think we can improve on that a little. Some acts are physical, such as moving from place to place. Other acts are mental, such as believing, fearing, remembering, choosing, and the like. The distinction is clear to most persons, and Dr. Branden devotes most of the first chapter of *Self-Esteem* to hammering it home. Now, given the distinction between mental and physical acts, and the dictum that action presupposes an entity that acts, we may agree to call an entity that performs physical acts a physical entity, or body, and an entity that performs mental acts a mental entity, or mind. We then have a choice between saying that some bodies are closely connected with minds and saying that some bodies *are* minds, i.e., that some entities

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<sup>11</sup> *The Vision of Ayn Rand*, pages 96–97.

perform both mental and physical acts. Dr. Branden, in company with Aristotle and some but not all theists, chooses the latter. He goes on to say that every entity, whether it is a mind or not, *must* be a body, since we have no experience of any mind that is not identical with, or connected with, a body. To speak of a bodiless mind is thus to be guilty of context-dropping. But, as Dr. Branden points out in the chapter just cited, I have no experience of a mind not identical with, or connected with, my own body. To speak of the consciousness of another human is also to remove consciousness from the only context in which I have encountered it.

Dr. Branden says that a bodiless mind means an entity aware without any means of awareness, which is absurd. Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that it is impossible for a mind to be directly aware of a physical situation, that it needs some means of awareness. What follows? In what sense are the sense organs a means of awareness? How is Jones aware that the grass is green? Green light from the grass enters his eye and strikes his retina, which then reacts in a certain way. But how does Jones know what is happening to his retina? Electrical impulses travel along the optic nerve from the retina to the brain. But how does Jones know what is happening in his brain? Somewhere along the line, a physical event, such as a neuron firing, must produce a mental event, such as Jones's awareness that the grass is green. If Dr. Branden has a theory of perception that does *not* at some point involve a physical cause of a mental event, I should like to hear it. But if physical things can and do cause mental events directly, then it is not clear why there cannot be a mind whose awareness that the earth is round is caused directly by the physical fact of the earth's being round.

Dr. Branden says: God is said to be omnipotent. This means that (1) God has no nature, (2) Things in general have no nature, and (3) Contradictions are possible.<sup>12</sup>

As for the first assertion, that God has no nature, I think that Dr. Branden has confused "can" with "might." To say that God can do anything is not to say that he might do anything. If we ask, "Can Miss Rand break a display window at Tiffany's with a baseball bat?" and "Might she?" the distinction is tolerably clear. To say that someone cannot do something is to say that there is a cause other than his will preventing him. To say that God can do anything is to say that there are no external obstacles to the

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<sup>12</sup> *The Vision of Ayn Rand*, page 97.

execution of his will, not that his will does not follow from the kind of being he is, just as Miss Rand's not breaking windows follows from the kind of being that she is.

Dr. Branden says: If God is omnipotent, then nothing has any nature. I think this is hasty. We say, in Dr. Branden's terms, that when we use a stone for a paperweight we know that it will stay where we put it and not go making figure eights in the air, because that would not be in accordance with its nature. But if someone comes by and picks up the stone, and starts waving it around in a figure-eight pattern, the nature of the stone has not been altered.

True enough, Dr. Branden might say, but if God might at any moment start picking up paperweights and moving them in figure-eight patterns, then we live in an irrational and chaotic world.

Again, I think that's hasty. I remind you of the parallel between God as creator of the world and a writer as creator of the events in a novel. As regards the contents of *Atlas Shrugged*, Miss Rand is omnipotent. She can make Hank Rearden and his wife fall madly in love with each other. She can make James Taggart, in the last chapter, throw off his pose of incompetence and come up with a new invention, better than Rearden Metal or the Galt Motor, that will save the world. She can make Dagny Taggart become a fanatical disciple of the Guru Maharaj Ji. All of the characters, all of the events, are utterly at her mercy. Does this mean that the novel must be without plot, without structure, without rationality? That none of the persons in it may be said to have a nature? Does it not rather mean that when we perceive the orderliness and rationality of the novel we are in touch with the rationality of Miss Rand's creative imagination? Very well, when we perceive the rationality of the world, we are in touch with the rationality of God.

Dr. Branden says: If God is omnipotent, contradictions are possible. Now clearly, if we define omnipotence as the power or ability to do anything, including the contradictory, it follows that the idea of an omnipotent being leads to contradictions. Since I do not believe in contradictions, I do not believe that God is omnipotent in that sense. When I say that God is omnipotent, I mean that for any situation S, God can bring about S if and only if there is no contradiction involved in God's bringing

about S. As far as I can see, this definition of omnipotence does not lead to contradictions.

Dr. Branden may complain, “But my definition of omnipotence is the correct one, and there is no possibility of discussion if you give words perverse and incorrect definitions.”

I ask in what sense Dr. Branden’s definition is the correct one. Is it for etymological reasons? Because “omnis” means “every” and ”potens” means “powerful”? But many Latinists would argue that ”omnipotens” originally meant “having power over all things” or even ”rightful authority over all things.” Besides, the etymological argument is a treacherous tool. Electrical devices are not really made of amber. Objectivism is not really the philosophy of throwing rocks, à la Abbie Hoffman. And not even a scholarly bus driver will let you ride without paying your fare just because you remind him that “bus” is short for “omnibus,” which means “for everyone.”

Does omnipotence imply the power to do everything because that is the definition that the man in the street would give? Beware of that argument unless you are prepared to accept the popular definition of ”anarchy,” of “selfishness,” of “morality,” and the like.

The relevant question here is surely how theologians use the word ”omnipotent,” and whether they have been accustomed to use it in Dr. Branden’s sense until he came along to point out the difficulties, whereupon they are now sneakily intending to change definitions and keep the game going. A bit of history is here indicated.

In the New Testament (Second Timothy 2:13) we read: “God cannot contradict Himself.”

Aristotle (*Metaphysics*, Becker page 1019) distinguishes relative and absolute impossibility, the former that which cannot be done by a given agent because of the limitations of that agent, the latter that which cannot be done at all. Aquinas (*Summa Theologiae*, Part 1, Question 25, Articles 3 and 4) refers to this passage and identifies the absolutely impossible with the contradictory. He defines omnipotence as the ability to do everything that is absolutely possible (i.e., non-contradictory). He comments on the text, “With God no thing shall be impossible,” (Luke 1:37) by saying, “A contradiction in terms cannot be a thing, for no mind can conceive it.”

Elsewhere (Part 1, Question 7, Article 3) he gives the creating of a thing with the property of not having been created as an example of something God cannot do.

A century before Aquinas, St. Anselm wrote his *Prosologium*, chapter 7 of which is headed, “How He [God] is omnipotent, although there are many things of which He is not capable.”

The point about contradiction is often worded in terms of altering the past. Aristotle (*Ethics*, Becker page 1139) approvingly quotes the poet Agathon as saying:

“For this alone is lacking e’en to God,  
To make undone the things that once are done.”

Eight centuries before Aquinas, St. Augustine wrote (*Against Faustus*, 25:5): “Whoever says, ‘If God is almighty, let Him make what has been done to be not-done,’ does not realize that he is saying, ‘If God is almighty, let Him make true things to be both true and false.’”

St. Jerome wrote (Epistle 24): “Though God can do everything, He cannot make the unspoilt from the spoilt.”

This is glossed as: “God cannot turn a harlot into a virgin, since the definition of a virgin includes her past history, and a virgin who has been a harlot is a contradiction.”

Jewish theologians also concur. Rabbi Moses Maimonides (*Guide for the Perplexed*, chapter 75, argument 1) says: “An agent is not deficient in power, if it is unable to perform what is intrinsically impossible. Thus we monotheists do not consider it a defect in God that He does not combine two opposites in one object, nor do we test his omnipotence by the accomplishment of any similar impossibility.”

I regret that my limited knowledge does not permit me to produce suitable quotations from Moslem sources. In summary, then, it is Dr. Branden who has given to the word “omnipotence” a private meaning of his own, and when he points out that God cannot be omnipotent in his special sense, theists from all centuries reply in chorus: “We never thought Him omnipotent in your sense. What else is new?”

And what of the Bible verse that says that with God all things are possible?

The commentary you will get on that verse depends on the theologian you approach. One answer might be: All sentences beginning “God can ...” are true, but a string of nonsense syllables does not suddenly become a sentence just because it is preceded by the two magic words, “God can.” God can do anything, but that is not the same thing as saying that He can both do it and not do it simultaneously. Contradictions are excluded, not because there are any limits to God’s power, but because nonsense remains nonsense even when we talk it about God. You ask whether God can make a round square. God can make any shape at all, but “round square” is not the name of a shape. You ask whether God can make a rock so heavy that He can’t lift it. Now for any human [X]<sup>13</sup>, there exists a number Y such that X cannot lift a rock whose weight is Y pounds or more. And God can make a rock weighing Y pounds. But for X equals God, there exists no such number Y, and therefore you have not specified a weight, and therefore have not asked a genuine question. Ask a genuine, meaningful, well-formed question of the form, “Can God do such-and-such?” and the answer will always be “Yes.”

Dr. Branden says that if God is omniscient, then everything must be fated and predetermined, in which case it cannot be changed, in which case God is not omnipotent.<sup>14</sup> I reply that divine omniscience, far from being incompatible with divine freedom, does not even impair *human* freedom. I offer three replies to Dr. Branden, each in itself sufficient.

The first is found in Boethius, in the *Consolations of Philosophy*, and is simply that, as we saw in the first part of this lecture, God is not in time. Spatial and temporal distances are part of the internal structure of the interlocking physical system which we call the cosmos, and do not relate the cosmos to God, who is the creator of the cosmos and its structure. Thus it is not strictly true that God knows today what will happen tomorrow. God’s knowledge is not a temporal event.

Alternately, we may note that Dr. Branden’s argument that divine omniscience implies fatalism has no real connection with divine

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<sup>13</sup> The material in brackets does not occur in the audio version of this essay, but it does appear in the dot-matrix transcription that Kiefer prepared.

<sup>14</sup> *The Vision of Ayn Rand*, pages 97–98.

omniscience, and can be stated just as well without it. Dr. Branden says, in effect: “God knows whether Jones will steal tomorrow. If God knows that Jones will steal, then Jones must steal, and if God knows that Jones will not steal, then Jones cannot steal. Either way, Jones is not free.” But Dr. Branden could equally well have said: “It is either true or false that Jones will steal tomorrow. If it is true, then Jones must steal. If it is false, then Jones cannot steal. Either way, Jones is not free.” If the omniscience of God is incompatible with freedom, then so is the Law of the Excluded Middle. A soldier goes into battle saying, “No use worrying. Either there is a bullet there with my name on it or there isn’t.” And he is quite right. Every bullet either does or does not have the property of being a bullet that is going to kill that soldier. Thus his fate is determined. Right? If this argument is sound, then Dr. Branden must abandon his belief in free will. If it is not sound, then the bullet *can* have the property *now* of being a future killer without making that future killing inevitable. And if so, then how does God’s knowing as regards each bullet whether it has that property alter matters?

One way out is to deny that each bullet does already either have or not have the property of being about to kill that soldier. We may say: At the present moment, the bullet is a potential killer and a potential non-killer, but neither an about-to-be killer nor an about-to-be non-killer. The statement that it will kill is not yet either true or false.

Aristotle (*On Interpretation*, Becker page 18) considers this argument, concludes that A or not-A, the Law of the Excluded Middle, is indeed incompatible with human freedom, and that, since freedom is a reality, the law must be inapplicable to future human action. He says,

In the case of that which is or which has taken place,  
propositions ... must be either true or false....

When, however, the subject is individual, and that which is predicated of it relates to the future, the case is altered. For if all propositions ... are either true or false, then ... there would be no need to deliberate or to take trouble, on the supposition that, if we should adopt a certain course, a certain event would follow, while, if we did not, the result would not follow. For a man may predict an event ten thousand years beforehand, and another predict the

reverse; that which was truly predicted<sup>15</sup> ... will of necessity take place in the fullness of time.

Further, it makes no difference whether people have or have not actually made the contradictory statements.... For events will not take place or fail to take place because it was stated that they would or would not take place....

Yet this view leads to an impossible conclusion; for we see that both deliberation and action are causative with regard to the future, and that ... there is a potentiality in either direction....

Since propositions correspond with facts, it is evident that when in future events there is a real alternative, and a potentiality in contrary directions, the corresponding affirmation and denial have the same character....

It is therefore plain that it is not necessary that of an affirmation and a denial one should be true and the other false. For in the case of that which exists potentially, but not actually, the rule which applies to that which exists actually does not hold good.

Aristotle's solution, if we accept it, permits us to say that God is omniscient but does not know whether Jones will steal tomorrow because the statement that Jones will steal tomorrow is in fact neither true nor false, but indeterminate, so that even an omniscient being, *especially* an omniscient being, when asked about the proposition that Jones will steal tomorrow, would have to answer, not "True" or "False," but "Indeterminate." This is not an admission of ignorance, but the correct answer, the *only* correct answer. It is like the situation in quantum physics, where, according to most physicists, a particle does not have an exact position, and the inexactness is not merely in our knowledge of the position, but in the position itself. Now if this be so, it is clear that not even an omniscient being can be expected to know the exact position of a particle that does not *have* an exact position. It is like saying that God must know the address of my stockbroker even though I don't *have* a stockbroker.

A third way of answering Dr. Branden is by calling attention to the ambiguity in statements of the form, "If A, then necessarily B." We say, for example, "If Jones is younger than Smith, then Jones must be younger than

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<sup>15</sup> In the audio version, Kiefer says "predicated." The text in his transcript, however, is correct and appears as shown.

Smith's mother." And it is easy to read this as meaning that if the first clause is true then the second clause expresses a necessary truth, an inescapable truth, a truth guaranteed by logic. But of course in such sentences logic does not guarantee B, but only the derivation of B from A. The adverb "necessarily" modifies, not "B," but "If A, then B." B is not a necessary *truth*, but a necessary *consequence* of A. Instead of saying, "Given A, B must hold," we ought to say, "Given A, B must follow."

Ambiguous sentence structures like "If A then necessarily B" seduce many people into overlooking this elementary but vital distinction and committing the Doris Day Fallacy. You remember the movie in which Doris Day sings, "Que sera, sera. Whatever will be, will be."<sup>16</sup>

Armed with the proposition that, if A holds, then A must hold, some very distinguished philosophers have argued that all truths whatever are truths of logic, so that the apparent distinction between "Two is larger than one" and "Jupiter is larger than Venus" is illusory. Others have argued against free choice, saying that if Jones chooses X then necessarily Jones chooses X, and if he chooses it necessarily then he does not choose it freely, and so does not choose it at all. Still other philosophers, as we have seen, argue that if God knows today that X will happen tomorrow then it is true today that X will happen tomorrow, and that this means that X *must* happen tomorrow, and so all is fated and predetermined. But once we remember to watch out for the Doris Day Fallacy, all these arguments collapse.

In summary, then, we have three possible answers to the assertion that divine foreknowledge precludes freedom. The first, from Boethius, is that God does not foreknow things because his acts of knowledge are undated. The second, from Aristotle, is that present statements about future choices or their results have indeterminate logical status, and that to know the truth in such instances is simply to know that the statement in question is indeterminate. The third, from Alfred Hitchcock, is that the whole question is a semantic pseudo-problem, an instance of the Doris Day Fallacy.

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<sup>16</sup> *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, Alfred Hitchcock, 1956. See YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZbKHDPPrc>).

Dr. Branden says: “To gather one’s knowledge by a process of struggle and effort is abhorrent to the mystic.... The concept of omniscience is a psychological monument to the mystic’s hatred of effort.”<sup>17</sup>

I am puzzled by this remark. It seems to say that it is unwholesome to dream of anyone’s knowing things without effort. But clearly this is not its meaning, since that would be an attack on Miss Rand. On pages 92–94 of *Atlas Shrugged* we read:

Francisco could do anything he undertook, he could do it better than anyone else, and he did it without effort. No matter what discipline was required of him by his father’s exacting plan for his education, no matter what subject he was ordered to study, Francisco mastered it with effortless amusement....

Dagny and Eddie spent their winters trying to master some new skill, in order to astonish Francisco and beat him, for once. They never succeeded. When they showed him how to hit a ball with a bat, a game he had never played before, he watched them for a few minutes, then said, “I think I get the idea. Let me try.” He took the bat and sent the ball flying over a line of oak trees far at the end of the field.<sup>18</sup>

If I were as ill-disposed toward Objectivism as Dr. Branden is toward theism, I would quote a series of such passages and say: “The portrayal of the character of Francisco d’Anconia is a psychological monument to the Objectivist’s hatred of effort.” But I won’t.

Dr. Branden says: If God is all-good, then he is not free to be bad, and so His actions have no moral significance, just as the actions of a robot have no moral significance.<sup>19</sup>

By Dr. Branden’s definition of free will as quoted above, an agent is free if it can perform actions not determined by antecedent factors or conditions, by forces outside its control. But there are no factors antecedent to God, who

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<sup>17</sup> *The Vision of Ayn Rand*, page 98.

<sup>18</sup> The citation is from the paperback edition. James seems to be quoting from memory here. The quoted material does not appear in the order in which he quotes it, but it all does appear on the pages he cites.

<sup>19</sup> *The Vision of Ayn Rand*, page 98.

has no cause. All his actions originate with him. They are therefore, by Dr. Branden's own criterion, free, and morally significant.

Surely there is a certain perverseness in the suggestion that the more trustworthy, the more reliable, someone is, the less he exhibits good moral character by his trustworthiness, and that someone who can be trusted unconditionally is by that very fact seen to be morally worthless. One is reminded of Professor Peikoff's altogether just strictures against those philosophers who say that the truths of logic and mathematics are void of factual content, and furnish no information except about the speech habits of those who use them. He says,

The ultimate result of ... the analytic-synthetic dichotomy is the following verdict pronounced on human cognition: ... if the proposition represents knowledge which is *certain*, then it does not represent knowledge of reality.... If a proposition is conclusively demonstrated — so that to deny it is obviously to endorse a logical contradiction — then, *in virtue of this fact*, the proposition is written off as a product of convention or arbitrary whim....

This theory represents a total epistemological inversion: it penalizes cognitive success for being success. Just as the altruist mentality penalizes the good for being the good, so the analytic-synthetic mentality penalizes knowledge for being knowledge. Just as, according to altruism, a man is entitled only to what he has not earned, so, according to this theory, a man is entitled to claim as knowledge only what he has not proved.

The quotation, incidentally, is taken from Professor Leonard Peikoff's thought-provoking article, "The Analytic-Synthetic Dichotomy," printed in five parts in the May through September 1967, issues of *The Objectivist*. I shall cite it hereafter simply as Professor Peikoff's article.<sup>20</sup>

Just as the philosophers of whom Professor Peikoff complains stand epistemology on its head, so Dr. Branden stands ethics on its head by saying that if God is completely good, then He is not good at all.

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<sup>20</sup> The quoted passage comes from Part V, "Conclusion," *The Objectivist*, September 1967. The article was later reprinted as a separate booklet by the Nathaniel Branden Institute, and then included in the Expanded Second Edition of Ayn Rand, *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology* (NAL Books, 1990), where the passage occurs on page 118.

An alternate analysis of Dr. Branden's assertion is that offered by Negative Theology, of which more later.

Having argued that God cannot be omnipotent, and that He cannot be good, Dr. Branden now undertakes to show that it is even more awkward to suppose that he is both at once: If God is both good and omnipotent, why is there evil in the world?<sup>21</sup>

I reply as follows:

To raise this question implies that there is some better state of affairs than the one we have, such that God, if He is good, would have preferred it, and God, if He's omnipotent, could have brought it about. Now, does Dr. Branden have such a state in mind, and if so, what is it?

Obviously the world would be a better place if men chose to make it such. The consistent practice of rationality, justice, and benevolence by all men would considerably reduce the amount of pain and suffering in the world. Shall we say that God ought to have made all men such that they would choose to behave better? But determining men to choose certain things freely is a contradiction.

Shall we say that God ought to have made men without free will, and hence without the possibility of doing wrong? But beings without free will, according to Dr. Branden, are incapable of doing right, either. Their actions have no moral significance, and their thoughts no rational significance. As Dr. Branden said in a passage already quoted, "The very concept of logic is possible only to a volitional consciousness."

I do not think that Dr. Branden would want to abolish freedom from the world, even if he could abolish pain and evil at the same time.

What about other possibilities? Suppose that God permitted men to choose as they pleased, but intervened to prevent their choices from having any untoward consequences? I cannot see that that involves any real choice at all. It is like having a free election in which the voters may pull any lever they please, but only the lever for the party in power is connected to anything.

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<sup>21</sup> *The Vision of Ayn Rand*, pages 98–99.

Perhaps the complaint is not that people can hurt themselves, but that they can hurt others. We might accept a world in which people suffered the consequences of their own irrationality, but it seems unfair that A should be penalized because B is malicious or stupid. But note that a world in which no action of my neighbor's can leave me worse off than if he had chosen otherwise is also a world in which no action of my neighbor's can leave me better off than if he had chosen otherwise. The proposed world is one in which no one can offer any benefit or assistance to anyone else; in which no one can accomplish anything of any significance to anyone else; in which gratitude, friendship, and significant relations between persons are unknown. That this would be a better world than ours is not obvious to me. Some people do in fact like the idea of living completely independent, solitary lives. If *they* had planned the universe, everyone would have his own planet. If you are convinced that this would be better than the present arrangement, then you have in hand an argument against the goodness of God. I doubt, however, that Miss Rand or Dr. Branden will take this line. Miss Rand has publicly stated that the achievement of which she is proudest is having married Frank O'Connor.<sup>22</sup> Dr. Branden's writings on romantic love are sufficient evidence of the positive value he attaches to personal relationships.

My first point, then, about the Problem of Evil, is concerned with Free Will. And if this is accepted, the problem becomes less formidable. As

Dr. Branden says in tonight's lecture,

Disasters are the exception, not the rule, in man's existence. Most of them are man-made, and man-caused. And as to the purely physical dangers and calamities — well, if it were true that physical nature was basically set against man, that the chances of catastrophe were greater than the chances of success, insurance companies would go broke instead of making the fortunes which they do make.<sup>23</sup>

I therefore invite you, faced with any instance of evil, to ask the question: "Would this evil still be here if every human had always acted

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<sup>22</sup> *Ayn Rand Answers: The Best of Her Q & A*, edited by Robert Mayhew (New York, New American Library, 2005), page 230.

<sup>23</sup> *The Vision of Ayn Rand*, pages 117–18.

rationally and morally?” Only in those instances where the answer is a confident affirmative does the Problem of Evil require a further answer.

Quite apart from the Free Will Argument, it is possible that adversity sometimes builds character, or that a world without pain or danger would be a world in which heroism is impossible. Before dismissing this notion as heartless, I wish that you would try an experiment. Take your copy of *Atlas Shrugged*, and go through it carefully, crossing out or rewriting every passage in which one of the heroes of the book is described as suffering any kind of physical or mental discomfort. Then read the revised work and form a judgement of the novel as a novel and of its heroes as heroes. The notion that there is no heroism without courage, no courage without danger, and that heroism is a better thing than safety is *not* merely a notion invented by a handful of theologians to defend the goodness of God with.

Some people say: Admittedly heroism is a good thing, in a world that has pain and danger in it. But it is good only in such a world. Far better to have neither heroism nor the need for it. To excuse pain and danger because they provide the opportunity for heroism is like praising smallpox (an evil), because without it we wouldn't have smallpox vaccine (a good). For my present purposes, it is enough to show that Dr. Branden could not possibly endorse this objection. Consider the following remarks in tonight's lecture:

Heaven, as their dream of a perfect existence, is a place where men will live in total passivity, where no choice, no action, no thought, will be necessary, where everything will be provided for them and everything will be taken care of, where they will experience automatic happiness without lifting a finger, or stirring a single brain cell, which they will no longer have to have. It is the same kind of ideal as the Garden of Eden, which the mystics project as the Utopia man has lost in punishment for the sin of disobedience, for acting on his own judgement.

Heaven is the projection of a state of existence that would be unbearable to any human being, to the exact extent to which he was human, meaning rational. It is a state of total stagnation, where no choices, and therefore no purposes, and therefore no achievements, would be possible. Only a confirmed parasite could desire such a state as an ideal fulfillment, a parasite who

does not mind seeing himself as a contented cow — an ethereal contented cow. Heaven is the dream universe of non-effort.<sup>24</sup>

The question, “Instead of giving us the strength to overcome obstacles, why didn’t God just give us a world without obstacles?” is a possible question, but not for an Objectivist.

Finally, some people say: “If creating a world involved the risk of so much pain and evil, a good God would not have created it at all.” To this I reply: “If you could annihilate yourself and the whole universe by pushing a button, would you?” The implied answer of some philosophers is, “I would blister my finger pushing that button!” But they are not Objectivist philosophers.

To anyone using the Atheist Proof from Evil, we may reply:

Just what is the sort of world that you think a good, omnipotent God would have created instead of this one? A world with no wrong choices, and no volitional consciousness? A world with no possibility of coercion, and no concept of justice or rights, no significant interpersonal contacts? A world with no danger and no heroism? No world at all? Blankout!

Thus far we have considered demands for general improvement of the universe. Some people have advanced demands for particular improvements. They concede that a program to eliminate all evil runs into complications, but they see no excuse for God’s letting certain things slide. Thus, the science editor of the *London Daily Worker*, Prof. J.B.S. Haldane, writes, “It would have been much more practical to have the windpipe in back of the esophagus, and one would have expected God to put it there.” I admit that the proposed change sounds efficient, but I should like to reserve final judgement until I can examine a working model.

Obviously we cannot undertake to evaluate all arguments of this sort, but I should like to make two general comments on them.

To say that God is all-good does not in any way imply that He regards human comfort as a value to be preferred above all others. We may go further and say that we have no grounds for supposing that He regards human *welfare* as a value to be preferred above all others. There may, for

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<sup>24</sup> *The Vision of Ayn Rand*, pages 110–11.

example, be created beings of volitional consciousness in the world other than humans, and their welfare may sometimes conflict with ours in ways that are not at all obvious to us. And quite aside from Martians, dolphins, and leprechauns, aside from conscious creatures altogether, there may be quite a number of things in the world that God is interested in even though we are not.

We cannot calculate all the consequences of a given action, and may therefore sometimes be mistaken about whether that action would result in an overall improvement of the state of things. If there is anything in the ecology controversy that should be uncontroversial, it is this: that altering the environment often has results that no one on either side anticipated.

And, because we do not know as much about the causal workings of the world as God does, it follows that some things we see will look pointless and foolish to us. If I am watching Bobby Fisher play chess, I expect that many of his moves will look like serious mistakes to me. If after every move, I found myself nodding and saying, “Ah, yes! Precisely the move that I would have suggested! I rather thought he would do that!” it would be a sign that he was no better a chess-player than I. I am not surprised to find Bobby Fisher a better chess-player than I, or God a better cosmos-designer.

In considering all these points, I ask you to remember that in this part of the discussion, Dr. Branden is trying to prove that there exists a procedure not involving self-contradiction that a good, omnipotent creator could have followed that would have guaranteed, independently of the choices of free created agents, a better world than this. The burden of proof is therefore on him, not me. I do not have to take every instance of evil in the world and show that it is entailed by a greater good. If I find that I can reconcile cancer with the goodness of God only by supposing that viruses have free will, I do not have to convince Dr. Branden that they do. He has to prove that they don't, or fall back on calling my position “outside the mainstream of modern medicine,” which is a somewhat weaker epithet than “contradictory.”

Dr. Branden says that belief in the goodness of God is immoral, in that it causes us to acquiesce in all kinds of evil.<sup>25</sup> But it does not require me to acquiesce in any evil that I am able to prevent. If I am in a canoe just above Niagara Falls, I do not at once assume that it is God's will that I perish. I try

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<sup>25</sup> *The Vision of Ayn Rand*, page 99.

to paddle for shore, or for a rock that I can leap out and cling to, or an overhanging branch, or whatever. If the shore is too far away, and there are no suitable rocks, no overhanging branches, and no paddle, then my religion advises me to relax and enjoy the ride. And Dr. Branden's advice on facing danger in tonight's lecture seems to amount to pretty much the same thing.<sup>26</sup> If anyone has a better idea, let me know.

Next, Dr. Branden speaks harshly about Negative Theology, the doctrine that no predicates whatever can truly be applied to God. He says that in this doctrine we see the real purpose of theism: "the hatred of man's mind and the desire to destroy it, to destroy all the cardinal concepts of man's reason, to destroy the base of man's consciousness, the law of identity, and to leave man on his belly as an abject idiot."<sup>27</sup>

Negative Theology isn't very popular in my circles, either. However, I am not persuaded that it is as irrational a venture as Dr. Branden makes it out to be. It started out, not with theologians meditating on the nature of God, but with philosophers meditating on the nature of ordinary physical objects and the language we use to describe them. We say, for example, that water is wet. I may also say, coming out of the shower, that my hair is wet. But these two objects are not wet in quite the same way. My hair is sometimes dry, but water is never dry and cannot be dry. My hair is wet because of its contact with water, whereas water is wet because — well, because it is water. It is the nature of water to be wet. Trying to put the distinction more neatly, I may say that water is *not* wet, that water is wetness itself. My hair has the property of wetness, and here the property is separable from the object (my hair) in imagination and will soon be separate in fact. But the water and its wetness are apparently inseparable, the object and its property are one. The water is not wet, i.e., it does not *have* wetness; it *is* wetness. Once I accept this as more satisfactory than my earlier naive notion that the word *wet* has the same meaning in the sentences, "Water is wet" and "My hair is wet," I naturally start applying this principle in as many other ways as possible. If I think of fire as a substance (and most peoples do until

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<sup>26</sup> *The Vision of Ayn Rand*, page 117: "[A rational man's] very refusal to indulge in any mystical attempts at hope will help to keep him fighting in any crisis or emergency, so long as any chance to succeed still exists. It will help to keep him from giving up too easily. It will make his mind exhaust every possibility before pronouncing a situation hopeless. When a man has done everything rationally possible to him, he takes with equanimity that which is outside his power. He does not expect to be omnipotent."

<sup>27</sup> *The Vision of Ayn Rand*, page 100.

they become fairly sophisticated about chemistry), then I will say that fire is not hot but is the cause of hotness in other things. I will note that people speak of visible light, but I will say that light is not really visible. We do not see light. We see tables and chairs by means of light. Material objects are visible. Light is visibility itself, the cause of visibility in other things. If I believe in God, I will eventually get around to saying that God is not good but is goodness itself, not wise but wisdom itself, and so forth. On this view, God is the cause of goodness in other things, but not Himself properly described as good, although it does no harm to call Him so in casual speech, just as most philosophers call a fire hot in casual speech. Sometimes the terminology used is that a soaked object is formally wet, whereas water is eminently wet. That this is not the best way of talking about God, or about water for that matter, may very well be true. But that it is all part of a sinister plot to destroy the mind, I doubt.

Faced with Dr. Branden's complaints that God is not free to be bad, and is not knowable, a negative theologian might reply: "You are right in saying that God is not good, since he is not potentially bad. To be wet means to be potentially dry. But there are different ways of not being wet. A shirt fresh from the dryer is not wet because it is dry. A prime number is not wet because the concept of wetness and dryness is not applicable to it. And water is not wet because it is wetness. You might say that none of the three hits the target of being wet, but that the shirt falls short of the target, the prime number is not aimed at the target, and water *is* the target. Just so, a murderer, a robot, and God are none of them good, but for the same three different reasons.

As for knowing God, of course God is not knowable, not intelligible. He is intelligibility itself, knowledge itself, the source, or ground, or cause, of knowledge and intelligibility in other things. If there were no God, if our minds were the product, ultimately, of accident, then no one could know anything. We believe that God exists, not because we have grasped all the implications of that statement, but because His existence is a prerequisite of our grasping anything. We believe in light, not because we can see it (in fact we cannot), but because we can see everything else." We believe in light, not because we can see it (in fact we cannot), but because we can see everything else."

### **Part 3: The Remainder of Dr. Branden's Speech Examined, and an Epilogue**

Up to this point, Dr. Branden has been arguing that theism is meaningless, irrational, immoral, and patently false. He now turns to demolish three traditional arguments for theism: the First Cause Argument, the argument from Design, and the argument from Life.

Before I begin to consider them, I warn you that I am not going to attempt a full-fledged defense of any of them. I consider that I have already given a valid proof, and that one valid proof of a theorem is enough. My only purpose is to show that Dr. Branden has dismissed them too lightly.

The best-known statement of the First Cause is that of St. Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologiae*. It may be summarized as follows:

About us we see causal series, with Z caused by Y, Y caused by X, and so on. But Aristotle has shown that a causal series must have a first member. (See Aristotle for details.) Therefore, there must be an entity A which causes something but is not caused by anything. Such an entity we call a First Cause.

Three questions present themselves: (1) Why must a causal series have a beginning? (2) What does a first cause have to do with God? And (3) Has Dr. Branden refuted this argument?

To the first question, one answer sometimes offered is that action presupposes an entity that acts, and that an intermediate cause does not act; it merely transmits the action of some previous entity. It is a conduit of action, and a conduit, regardless of length, is no substitute for a source. Or again, it is said that an infinite regress of intermediate causes is like an infinite regress of intermediate values. Suppose that a blacksmith says that a hammer is a valuable object because it can be used to make other hammers. We ask him the point of making other hammers, and he replies that their value lies in their usefulness for making still more hammers. We may surely say that unless some hammer has value either in itself or in its use for some purpose other than hammer-making, then no hammer has value at all. A world with only intermediate values is a world with no values. In the same way, a world with only intermediate causes is a world with no causes.

Assuming that Aquinas has proved the existence of a First Cause, what has that to do with God? To this question, St. Thomas might reply: “Keep reading, please, there’s more to come. Even if you have swallowed the First Cause Argument, remember that one swallow doesn’t make a *Summa!* My one article on the existence of a First Cause is followed by two dozen articles on what a first cause must be like, and the answer, briefly, is, like God.”

We turn now to Dr. Branden’s refutation of the First Cause Argument. He summarizes the argument as follows: “Since everything in the Universe requires a cause, must not the Universe itself have a cause, which is God.” He then accuses its adherents of two fallacies: (1) they forget that if everything has a cause, then God must have a cause, and (2) they forget that, since the Universe is the sum of all that exists, it can have nothing outside itself, and so can have no cause outside itself.<sup>28</sup>

Now obviously Dr. Branden is not talking about Aquinas’s argument at all. Aquinas never assumes that everything has a cause, only that at least one thing does. He does not conclude that there is an entity A that causes the Universe, only that A causes something and that there is nothing that causes A. And of course the two fallacies that Dr. Branden complains of correspond to nothing at all in Aquinas. We must conclude that Dr. Branden has somewhere encountered a quite different version of the argument, and I now conjecture what that version is.

Consider the concept of dependence. As we see from the discussion of concepts in Miss Rand’s *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, and also in Professor Peikoff’s article, this is simply the totality of all things that have causes, that depend for their existence on something outside themselves. Now the most obvious and fundamental property of this concept, this totality, is that it has a cause. A is A. Existence exists. Consciousness is conscious. Dependence depends. Depends on what? On something other than itself, on independence, autonomy, self-reliance, on the First Cause.

Now the word “Universe,” which Dr. Branden uses to mean the sum of all things whatever, is also used in a narrower sense to mean the sum of all dependent things. (See Webster, Oxford, Funk and Wagnalls, or the Random

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<sup>28</sup> *The Vision of Ayn Rand*, pages 100–102.

House *American College Dictionary*.) If someone stated the above argument, using the word “Universe” in its narrower sense as synonymous with “Dependence,” while Dr. Branden understood it as synonymous with “Existence,” then his analysis and rebuttal would be dead on target as applied to the argument he thought he was hearing, but completely irrelevant to the argument the speaker intended. When the difficulties of communication are cleared up, Dr. Branden’s two objections simply vanish. And what he would have said to the cleared-up argument, we do not know. Therefore, if we wish an Objectivist-oriented analysis of the First Cause Argument, we must construct it ourselves. And first we must consider what it means to cause something.

When we say that the spectacular rise in the price of wheat in 1884 was caused by the eruption of Krakatoa the previous year, we mean that the rise would not have occurred if it had not been for Krakatoa. To say, correctly or otherwise, that the Battle of New Orleans would have been averted if Napoleon had been killed by a falling meteorite in 1811 is to speak of an alternate possibility, a situation in which Napoleon *is* killed by a falling meteorite, and the Battle of New Orleans does not take place. Where such an alternate possibility does not exist, we do not talk about cause. No one asks for the cause of the fact that things equal to the same thing are equal to each other, because there is no possibility of their being otherwise. To discuss the cause of X is to say that X would have been different, given such and such, which is nonsense unless X could have been different, unless there is a real alternative to X.

This analysis of causation — is it sound Objectivist philosophy? I submit that it is, and offer a few quotations from *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* as evidence:

[Alan Greenspan, “Antitrust,” page 66]: The observable tendency of an industry’s dominant companies eventually to lose part of their share of the market, is not caused by antitrust legislation, but by the fact that it is difficult to prevent new firms from entering the field when the demand for a certain product increases. Texaco and Gulf, for example, would have grown into large firms even if the original Standard Oil Trust had not been dissolved. Similarly, the United States Steel Corporation’s

dominance of the steel industry half a century ago would have been eroded with or without the Sherman Act.<sup>29</sup>

[Nathaniel Branden, “Common Fallacies about Capitalism,” page 88]: Let anyone who believes that a high standard of living is the achievement of labor unions and government controls, ask himself the following question: If one had a “time machine” and transported the united labor chieftains of America, plus three million government bureaucrats, back to the tenth century — would *they* be able to provide the medieval serf with electric light, refrigerators, automobiles, and television sets? When one grasps that they would *not*, one should identify who and what made these things possible.<sup>30</sup>

These statements seem quite clear. In each of them, the author assumes that when something is caused, we can without nonsense talk of an imaginary universe in which the cause is absent and the event therefore does not occur. In short, he assumes that whatever is caused could have been otherwise.

Now Professor Peikoff, in the article we have cited, considers what it means to say that some event need not have occurred, or that some situation could have been other than in fact it is. He concludes that the only facts that are not necessary, that could have been otherwise, are what he calls *man-made* facts, meaning facts that result from, are dependent on, were brought about by, the free choice of an agent of volitional consciousness. He says (Part 4, pages 8 and 10),

As far as metaphysical reality is concerned (omitting human actions from consideration for the moment), there are no “facts which happen to be but could have been otherwise” as against “facts which must be.” There are only: facts which *are*....

A major source of confusion, in this issue, is the failure to distinguish *metaphysical* facts from *man-made* facts — i.e., facts which are inherent in the identities of that which exists, from facts which depend on the exercise of human volition. Because

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<sup>29</sup> *Capitalism, the Unknown Ideal*. James is citing the paperback edition. The corresponding page in the hardback edition (New York: New American Library) is 56.

<sup>30</sup> The corresponding page in the hardback edition is 81.

man has free will, no human choice — and no phenomenon which is a product of human choice — is metaphysically necessary. In regard to any man-made fact, it is valid to claim that man *has* chosen thus, but it was not inherent in the nature of reality for him to have done so; he could have chosen otherwise....

Only in regard to the man-made is it valid to claim: “It happens to be, but it could have been otherwise.”<sup>31</sup>

With these remarks to guide us, let us re-examine the First Cause Argument.

According to Professor Peikoff, whatever could have been otherwise was brought about by the choice of an agent. Please note that when I say “choice,” I mean “free choice,” and when I “agent,” I mean “a being of volitional consciousness, capable of choosing freely.” We have now an eleven-step argument. This is easier to follow with a blackboard than when it’s just spoken, but I’ll do my best:

**Step 1:** Let us call an entity temporal if it has a beginning in time, and eternal if it does not have a beginning in time. Then, applying the principle A or not-A, found on page 994 of *Atlas Shrugged*,<sup>32</sup> we conclude that **every entity is either temporal or eternal.**

**Step 2:** Dr. Branden, on page 19 of the May 1962 *Objectivist Newsletter* says, “All emergences of new entities presuppose the existence of entities that caused their emergence.” We may therefore say, **Whatever is temporal is caused.**

**Step 3:** As we have just seen in connection with the quotations from *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*, **whatever is caused could have been otherwise.**

**Step 4:** As we have just seen from Professor Peikoff’s article, **whatever could have been otherwise was brought about by the choice of some agent.**

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<sup>31</sup> The passages occur in the hardback printing of the Expanded Edition of *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology* on pages 109, 110, and 111. James is quoting from memory, and I have silently corrected his minor errors in quotation; I have made similar silent corrections in other quotations throughout.

<sup>32</sup> Actually, page 944 in the paperback edition.

**Step 5:** Since we know that whatever is temporal is caused, whatever is caused could have been otherwise, and whatever could have been otherwise was brought about by the choice of an agent, we may conclude that **every temporal entity was brought about by the choice of some agent.**

**Step 6:** Since every temporal entity was brought about by the choice of some agent, and everything is either temporal or eternal, then **every temporal agent was brought about either by the choice of a prior temporal agent, or by the choice of an eternal agent.**

**Step 7:** From the previous step it follows that **every temporal entity is part of a causal chain that either (a) begins with an eternal agent, or (b) includes an infinite series of temporal agents, each caused by a prior temporal agent.**

**Step 8:** Dr. Branden says, on page 19 of the May 1962 *Objectivist Newsletter*, “There cannot be an infinite series of antecedent causes.” We conclude that **an infinite chain of temporal agents, each caused by a prior temporal agent, is impossible.**

**Step 9:** Since, as we have noted in Steps 7 and 8, every temporal entity is part of a causal series that either is infinite or begins with an eternal agent, and an infinite series of antecedent causes is impossible, we conclude that **every temporal entity was caused, directly or indirectly, by an eternal agent.**

**Step 10:** In the autobiographical postscript to *Atlas Shrugged*, Miss Rand says, “I was born.” We therefore conclude that **there exists at least one temporal entity, Miss Rand.**

**Step 11:** Since every temporal entity was brought about by an eternal agent and Miss Rand is a temporal entity, we may conclude that **there is an eternal agent whose free choice is, directly or indirectly, the ultimate cause of Miss Rand’s existence.**

And that concludes my analysis of the First Cause Argument in the light of Objectivist principles.

We have not, of course, established very much *about* this eternal agent, perhaps not enough to justify calling it God. For a full-fledged discussion we should want to consider uniqueness, benevolence, imperishability (whether

the eternal agent is without end as well as without beginning), prudence (meaning whether the eternal agent intends all the consequences of its choices, which many agents obviously do not), and so on. But I shall not pursue this line tonight. As I remarked earlier, I have already offered one proof that I think valid. My only concern with the three arguments that Dr. Branden cites is to show that there is more to them than meets the eye — more than meets Dr. Branden’s eye, at any rate.

Dr. Branden, commenting on the Argument from Design, says that the alternative to design, or order, is chaos, which is not really an alternative at all. Every conceivable state of affairs exhibits a pattern, simply by being what it is.<sup>33</sup>

Let us begin by distinguishing between order and functionality. When we say that we see order in an object or situation, we mean that we see regularity, predictability, conformance to a structure or pattern. When we say that we see functionality in an object or situation, we mean that we see means-end relationships built into the object, that we can say that some features of the object are “for” something. A salt crystal exhibits order but not in any obvious way functionality. A watch exhibits functionality, in that an intelligent Martian, looking at a watch, might say, “I think I can see what this is for. The hands go around at a constant rate, and the cover is hard so that the hands will not be broken, and transparent so that they can be seen. The geared wheels are there to transmit motion. If they were farther apart they would not mesh and if they were closer they would jam. The function of the spring is ...” and so on. Some people object that any conceivable object does what it does, and so may be said to have parts whose function is to do just that. But in practice, the notion of a functional object seems to be clear to everybody, and everyone seems to understand that an organism, any organism, is a functional object in a sense in which not just any object is. Militantly atheistic professors of biology will say things like, “Now this organ is a bit of a puzzle. Its purpose has not yet been discovered,” without realizing that they have said anything remarkable.

Now a natural thing to say about an object that exhibits functionality is that it probably came about by design, i.e., by someone’s intention. The Martian examining the watch will say, “It looks as if somebody made this to tell time with.” The astronomer examining the placing of the stones at

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<sup>33</sup> *The Vision of Ayn Rand*, pages 102–103.

Stonehenge will say, “It looks as if someone built this to make astronomical measurements with.” The man observing the eye of the mosquito will say, “It looks as if someone designed this for the mosquito to see with.”

One reply to the argument from functionality, with the argument from life as a special case, is not philosophical but scientific. The stronger the case for Darwinian evolution, the more plausibly this explains how the mosquito get his eye, the weaker the argument from functionality, and vice versa. However, arguments for and against evolution (1) require specialized knowledge and (2) can never be conclusive one way or the other. An example of the sort of thing that goes on: The anti-evolutionist says,

“A reptile has six bones in each side of his lower jaw. A mammal has one. The standard evolutionist account, based on comparative embryology and the like, is that when reptiles evolved into mammals, three of the six bones moved up and became the bones of the middle ear, two disappeared, and one remained to form the mammalian jaw. It would greatly ease my mind if you would draw me a series of ten sketches or thereabouts, showing the intermediate stages in this development, and how each animal was able to eat and hear, and why each stage was a sufficient improvement on the preceding one to have developed from it by Natural Selection. Never mind going to the museum to look at fossils of the intermediate stages. No such fossils have ever been discovered. But I am reasonable. I do not ask you to show me *how* it happened — just one of the ways in which it *might* have happened.”

If the evolutionist has no plausible reply, then the anti-evolutionist scores a point, which may, however, be taken from him any time that the evolutionist finds a fossil or contrives a sketch. At the end of each round of the debate, we add up the cumulative points on both sides and decide how firmly we will believe or disbelieve the Argument from Functionality while waiting for the next round. The debate is never really over, and it takes a fair amount of study even to keep up with it, let alone to get involved. Currently, I am not involved.

Dr. Branden suggests that we need no explanation for the fact that a given organism has all the equipment it needs for survival, since if it didn't have the equipment, it wouldn't be here.<sup>34</sup>

This seems hasty. Suppose that we are drilling a tunnel through solid rock, and encounter a cavity or bubble in the rock, completely surrounded by rock until we drilled into it. In the cavity is a man seated in an armchair and smoking a pipe. We say, "Good Heavens! How did you get here? This calls for some explanation." He replies, "Don't be silly. If I hadn't gotten here, you wouldn't be talking to me. Therefore no explanation is necessary." Would this satisfy Dr. Branden? I doubt it.

The Argument from Life, as Dr. Branden states it, is that the probability of life's having arisen by chance is so remote that any reasonable man will opt for the alternative explanation that life arose by design.<sup>35</sup> It is convenient here to distinguish between chance and accident. We have already defined "design" as that which occurs by someone's intent and "accident" as that which occurs not by someone's intent. We may define "chance" as that which occurs in a seemingly irregular way, so that individual predictions are not possible, although statistical predictions may be. Now Dr. Branden's contention<sup>36</sup> is that the Argument from Life depends on confusing chance with accident. Instead of the legitimate dichotomy between design and accident, the theist has substituted the illegitimate one between design and chance, and then tried to rule out chance. Dr. Branden says that life (unless it always existed, a possibility he leaves open) did originate by accident, but not by chance, because there is no such thing as chance. Except in connection with free will, chance can refer only to our knowledge, not to the actual course of events.

Now the first thing to be noticed about Dr. Branden's analysis here is that it makes nonsense of almost every scientific experiment. We wish, for example, to learn whether cyanide is bad for rats. We take a thousand rats and feed cyanide to half of them. Five minutes later, the ones who have been fed cyanide are all dead, and the others are all alive. We conclude that it is very probable indeed that cyanide is bad for rats. In walks Dr. Branden, who

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<sup>34</sup> *The Vision of Ayn Rand*, page 103.

<sup>35</sup> *The Vision of Ayn Rand*, pages 104–107.

<sup>36</sup> I have followed the dot-matrix transcript that James prepared and kept the word "contention." It is clear from the audio that in saying "argument," James misspoke himself, but continued rather than correct himself.

asks, “On what basis do you exclude the alternate theory that the five hundred rats all dropped dead for various reasons having nothing to do with the cyanide?” We say, “That would be a remarkable co-incidence. The odds against getting this result by chance are ...“ Dr. Branden interrupts to say: “Nonsense! There is no such thing as co-incidence, no such thing as chance. They are only the measure of our ignorance. If your rats would all have died even without the cyanide, it is not that they would have died by chance, but by cancer, tuberculosis, atherosclerosis, old age, and the like, all in accordance with fixed laws. It was inevitable that they die. To speak of the probability of their doing so as if chance were operative, is meaningless.”

I do not deny that there are philosophical problems connected with the foundations of statistics. But Dr. Branden’s approach amounts to abandoning all scientific research. If he took this attitude consistently, instead of just when talking about theism, he would be a greater enemy of the Industrial Revolution than any Miss Rand has denounced.

Dr. Branden, in replying to the Argument from Life, might easily have invoked Darwinian Evolution. Strangely, he does not. He says, “That which happens in the universe happens by necessity, by the intrinsic natures of the entities involved. Whether life is some primary element that has always existed, or whether it arose out of a combination of other elements in a manner yet unknown, is a question really irrelevant to our purpose here.”<sup>37</sup>

I ask you to recall the passage in John Galt’s speech (*Atlas Shrugged*, page 968) where he refers to those who deny human creativity: “An industrialist — blank-out — there is no such person. A factory is a ‘natural resource,’ like a tree, a rock, or a mud puddle. The problem of production, they tell you, has been solved and deserves no study or concern.... Who solved the problem of production? Humanity, they answer. What was the solution? The goods are here. How did they get here? Somehow.”

Dr. Branden has no patience with such fools, with those who attribute technological progress to the impersonal forces of history, those who engage in a mean-spirited refusal to acknowledge the achievements of the human mind. Dr. Branden is incapable of beholding a bridge, a locomotive, or a skyscraper without a warm and generous admiration for the genius that made it possible. His scorn would utterly wither anyone who suggested that we

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<sup>37</sup> *The Vision of Ayn Rand*, page 104.

need no explanation for the fact that the locomotive works, since if it didn't it wouldn't be here. But confront him with a living organism, and he abandons Hank Reardon to join Bertram Scudder.

The problem of producing organisms capable of survival, he tells us, has been solved and deserves no study or concern. Who solved the problem? The entities involved, he answers. What was the solution? The organisms are here. How did they get here? Somehow.

The whole of *Atlas Shrugged* is a refutation of the view that the *economy* is capable of creating and maintaining itself without reference to mind, but that the *ecology* is capable of creating and maintaining itself without reference to mind — Blank-out!

At this point in his speech, Dr. Branden quotes a paper written by Professor Peikoff when he was still a student. Young Peikoff says that monotheism followed polytheism and developed out of it. He seems to be suggesting that the basis of religious belief is polytheism, which he can count on his readers' regarding as absurd, and that monotheism is an unsuccessful effort to salvage the system by reducing the number of absurdities and placing them at a distance where their irrational intrusion into everyday affairs is less noticeable. I doubt that this is good history. Many anthropologists believe that monotheism is older than polytheism, and I find their arguments (what I have read of them) impressive. But this is, in a way, a side issue. Peikoff is chiefly concerned to contrast religious explanations with scientific ones, to the disadvantage of the former. Now that we have scientific explanations, he says, and can see that the others were not only wrong but were the wrong *sort* of explanations, we can see that belief in God or the gods rested in the first place on a mistake about the nature of explanation, and should be abandoned now that the mistake has been cleared up.<sup>38</sup>

Peikoff assumes that the two explanations of the overflow of the Nile — (1) it overflows because of seasonal rainfall upstream, and (2) it overflows by the will of the god of the Nile — are mutually exclusive, rival answers to the same question. I believe that he is mistaken. Let us consider an episode in Shakespeare's play, *Hamlet*. The maid Ophelia, crazed with grief at her father's murder, climbs onto a tree branch that overhangs the water. The

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<sup>38</sup> *The Vision of Ayn Rand*, pages 104–107.

branch breaks, and she falls in and drowns. Let us ask the question: Did Ophelia drown because Shakespeare for dramatic reasons wanted her to die at that stage in the story, or because the branch broke? We see at once — do we not? — that both answers are true, that we are concerned with two different kinds of causes. I propose to call them empirical and volitional cause. Shakespeare is the volitional cause of all the events in the play. They occur because he wills that they should. But he also wills that they should not be separate, disconnected events, but fitted together into a pattern that exhibits order, regularity, symmetry, structure, and beauty. Once we have become accustomed to the pattern, we may begin to infer some events from others. In a symphony, a melodic fragment or motif may occur several times. Once we have begun to understand the pattern, the structure, of the symphony, we may often be able to guess what note will come next. Similarly, when spring returns, we may say, “I have heard this theme before. In about ten days, the Nile will begin to flood.” And this is scientific inference, based on empirical causation. But, as we have learned from Professor Peikoff himself just a few minutes ago, the mature Peikoff supplying the corrective to the exuberant over-simplifications of the youthful Peikoff, where there is causation there are real alternatives, and where there are real alternatives there is volitional causation.

Next, Dr. Branden considers agnosticism, and we must pause to make a distinction. He who says, “I don’t know” may mean, “I am not absolutely certain. My conclusion is tentative and provisional, subject to revision in the light of further evidence or argument.” With this, as far as I know, neither Dr. Branden nor I have any quarrel. On the other hand, he may mean, “I am neutral. I take no stand.” And frequently this is just not possible. A man may very well be neutral, both before and after studying the best available evidence, on whether there is life on other planets, whether Mary Queen of Scots was guilty as charged, and the like. He cannot be neutral when faced with a proposition relevant to his actions. Your estimate of the chance of rain may be anywhere from zero to one hundred percent, but either you take an umbrella or you don’t. Either you vote for candidate X or you don’t. Either you join church Y or you don’t. Either you go to the doctor with a minor but puzzling ailment or you don’t. And failure to act is not neutrality. It involves a judgement. The earlier discussion of faith in the sense of gambling on a proposition is relevant here.

Insofar as whether a given act is reasonable depends on whether God exists, the question of theism versus atheism cannot be shelved. And a

professed agnostic, or for that matter a professed theist, who acts in every way as if God did not exist, has in fact opted for atheism.

Dr. Branden denounces agnosticism as cowardly. He does not, you may note, urge that the arguments for atheism render agnosticism untenable, but supposes for the sake of argument that neither side has any arguments at all. The burden of proof, he says, is on the theist, and if neither side has anything to say, it is irrational not to side with the atheist.<sup>39</sup>

He then supplies a curious analogy. If someone says that your friend has committed a murder, and he says that he has not, and there is no evidence either way, Dr. Branden says that it is immoral for you to be agnostic on the subject.<sup>40</sup> But, suppose that someone comes to you with a census list of all the people in the United States. He points to the first name on the list and says, “Do you believe this person to be guilty of murder or not guilty? Or are you agnostic on the matter?” You ask, “What is the evidence, please?” He answers, “There is no evidence available one way or the other, just the name. Your belief, please?” You start to say, “I don’t know,” but, cringing at the memory of Dr. Branden’s scorn, you hastily amend this to a firm, “I believe the accused to be innocent.” He then proceeds to the next name on the list, and the next. A long time later, he says, “Well, now, you have committed yourself to the belief that not one person in the United States has committed a murder. Shall we pension off the Homicide Division?” At this point you realize that you have every business being agnostic about whether an utter stranger has committed a murder, although agnosticism does not mean that you think the odds are fifty-fifty. Dr. Branden has confused the issue by supposing that it is a friend of yours who is accused. He does, in fact, believe that your attitude toward an accused friend should be different from your attitude toward an accused stranger. He believes in trusting one’s friends in a way that is not simply determined by the evidence, or lack of it. In fact, Dr. Branden is endorsing the Christian virtue of Faith in sense Four as defined earlier.

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<sup>39</sup> *The Vision of Ayn Rand*, pages 107–109.

<sup>40</sup> *The Vision of Ayn Rand*, pages 109–110.

Dr. Branden now undertakes to examine the motives behind the mystics' views. He says that their idea of Heaven is a place where no one will have to think or make any effort — like the Garden of Eden.<sup>41</sup>

I reply: Branden is quite wrong about the Christian view of Heaven. Establishing what this view is would take some time, but there *is* a short standard description of the Garden of Eden, and he ought to have read it. It distinctly says that man was put into the garden to dress it and to keep it. He was also told, *before* the Fall, to be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it.<sup>42</sup> It sounds like a fairly brisk program.

Many people, continues Dr. Branden, turn to religion because they are tired of trying to go it on their own, tired of trying to think for themselves, and want a crutch, something to lean on, someone to think for them.<sup>43</sup>

He is, of course, quite right. People do often become theists for such motives. But so what? Some people become Objectivists because they find themselves confused about politics, ethics, or other such matters, and long to hear a crisp, clear, confident voice telling them what's what. Miss Rand has a crisp, clear, confident voice. So, for that matter, does Dr. Branden. I am not suggesting that they encourage blind faith. They tell their listeners to be sure to think for themselves. But this command is not easily enforced, and in practice there are not many people who have been kicked out of a Rand or Branden lecture for failure to ask enough probing questions. Does this disprove Objectivism? Of course not. Neither does the corresponding phenomenon disprove theism.

Dr. Branden quotes at length from St. Augustine, who says that the world is full of disquiet, griefs, fears, angers, hatreds, deceit, envy, murder, storms, floods, hail, earthquake, mad dogs, and other nuisances, and leaves considerable room for improvement. Well, doesn't it?<sup>44</sup> Dr. Branden, when talking about the problem of evil, seems to think it does. But perhaps someone may feel that the way St. Augustine goes on and on, piling up example after example, suggests a morbid and unwholesome fascination with the subject.

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<sup>41</sup> *The Vision of Ayn Rand*, pages 110–11.

<sup>42</sup> Genesis 1:28–30.

<sup>43</sup> *The Vision of Ayn Rand*, pages 113–14.

<sup>44</sup> *The Vision of Ayn Rand*, pages 114–16.

As a matter of fact, it only shows that he is a professional orator. In ancient Greece and Rome, when laws were passed and cases were tried by large assemblies, rhetoric, the art of speaking in public, of persuading a crowd, was one that few citizens felt they could neglect. (Socrates was one of the few, and we know what happened to him!) The art was used in areas where we might not expect it. Every top-ranking Athenian surgeon had an orator whom he called in when needed, first to give a speech to the patient persuading him to submit to the operation, and later, when the patient was strapped down and the operation was in progress, a speech inspiring him to bear the pain with courage. The art, at first utilitarian, began to be admired for its own sake. If you want to get the idea, read some of the speeches of Cicero, but remember that in most of them he was really trying to win an argument that mattered.

As the Republic declined, and the Senate became more and more a rubber stamp, rhetoric became more and more artificial. Certain conventional flourishes, certain figures of speech, were valued not as convincing but as ornamental. If your neighbor's goat got into your garden, you sued your neighbor, and your lawyer, having almost parenthetically summarized the facts of the case, spoke at length on the sacredness of a man's home and garden, how brave men had since time immemorial risked their lives in defense of their homes and their little plots of ground, how a man tending his garden, seeing things grow under the ministrations of his own hands, felt close to the very secret of life itself. Three hours of this sort of thing was about routine, and no one suggested that he just state his case and sit down. The court, the litigants, and the spectators had all come, expecting a performance, a work of art, and if they had heard a simple direct statement instead, they would have been as disappointed as a Rolling Stones fan who attends a concert expecting three hours of Mick Jagger, and is offered ten minutes of Perry Como instead. Augustine, long before he became a Christian, had reached the top of his field — chief professor of rhetoric of the city of Milan, which had replaced Rome as the residence of the Emperor in the West. None of his readers, pagan or Christian, would have thought that Augustine was going overboard in this passage. He was pulling out all the stops, as a good orator should. Turn him loose on the opposite topic, the good side of living, and he will be just as enthusiastic. If Dr. Branden, having quoted the passage he does, from *The City of God*, book 22, chapter 22, had turned the page, he would have found the start of the following:

But we must now contemplate all the rich and countless blessings with which the goodness of God, who cares for all He has created, has filled this very misery of the human race.... It is He, then, who has given to the human soul a mind, in which reason and understanding lie as it were asleep during infancy, ... destined, however, to be awakened and exercised as years increase, so as to become capable of knowledge and of receiving instruction, fit to understand what is true and to love what is good.... And even though this be not uniformly the result, yet who can competently utter or even conceive the grandeur of this work of the Almighty, and the unspeakable boon He has conferred upon our rational nature, by giving us even the capacity of such attainment? For over and above those arts which are called virtues ... has not the genius of man invented and applied countless astonishing arts, partly the result of necessity, partly the result of exuberant invention, so that this vigor of mind ... betokens an inexhaustible wealth in the nature which can invent, learn, or employ such arts? What wonderful — one might say stupefying — advances has human industry made in the arts of weaving and building, of agriculture and navigation! With what endless variety are designs in pottery, painting, and sculpture produced, and with what skill executed! What wonderful spectacles are exhibited in the theatres, which those who have not seen them cannot credit! To provoke appetite and please the palate, what a variety of seasonings have been concocted! To express and gain entrance for thoughts, what a multitude and variety of signs there are, among which speaking and writing hold the first place! What ornaments has eloquence at command to delight the mind! what wealth of song is there to captivate the ear! how many musical instruments and strains of harmony have been devised! what skill has been attained in measures and numbers! with what sagacity have the movements and connections of the stars been discovered! Who could tell the thought that has been spent on nature, even though, despairing of recounting it in detail, he endeavored only to give a general view of it?...

Moreover, even in the body, though it dies like that of the beasts, and is in many ways weaker than theirs, what goodness of God, what providence of the great Creator, is apparent! The organs of sense — and the rest of the members, are they not so

placed, the appearance, and form, and stature of the body as a whole, is it not so fashioned, as to indicate that it was made for the service of a rational soul? Man has not been created stooping towards the earth, like the irrational animals; but his bodily form, erect and looking heavenwards, admonishes him to mind the things that are above. Then the marvelous nimbleness which has been given to the tongue and the hands, fitting them to speak, and write, and execute so many duties, and practise so many arts, does it not prove the excellence of the souls for which such an assistant was provided? And even apart from its adaptation to the work required of it, there is such a symmetry in its various parts, and so beautiful a proportion maintained, that one is at a loss to decide whether, in creating the body, greater regard was paid to utility or to beauty. Assuredly no part of the body has been created for the sake of utility which does not also contribute something to its beauty. And this would be all the more apparent, if we knew precisely how all its parts are connected and adapted to one another, and were not limited in our observations to what appears on the surface; for as to what is covered up and hidden from our view, the intricate web of veins and nerves, the vital parts of all that lies beneath the skin, no one can discover it.... But if these could be known, then even the inward parts, which seem to have no beauty, would so delight us with their exquisite fitness, as to provide a profounder satisfaction to the mind ... than the obvious beauty which gratifies the eye....

How can I tell of the rest of creation, with all its beauty and utility, which the divine goodness has given to man to please his eye and serve his purposes.... Shall I speak of the manifold and various loveliness of sky, and earth, and sea; of the plentiful supply and wonderful qualities of the light; of sun, moon, and stars; of the shade of trees; of the colors and perfume of flowers; of the multitude of birds, all differing in plumage and in song; of the variety of animals, of which the smallest in size are often the most wonderful — the works of ants and bees astonishing us more than the huge bodies of whales? Shall I speak of the sea, which itself is so grand a spectacle, when it arrays itself as it were in vestures of various colors, now running through every shade of green, and again becoming purple or blue?... What shall I say of the numberless kinds of food to alleviate hunger, and the variety of seasonings to stimulate appetite which are scattered

everywhere by nature, and for which we are not indebted to the art of cookery? How many natural appliances are there for preserving and restoring health! How grateful is the alteration of day and night! how pleasant the breezes that cool the air! how abundant the supply of clothing furnished us by trees and animals! Who can enumerate all the blessing we enjoy? If I were to attempt to detail and unfold only those few which I had indicated in the mass, such an enumeration would fill a volume.

Augustine's whole thesis, repeated and elaborated throughout his work, is that the world was created by God and is therefore in essence good. Created agents, by choosing freely and sometimes choosing wrongly, have messed it up, but have created no bad thing. What we call bad things are good things distorted or spoiled but with the good in them still outweighing the bad, still central, whereas the bad is only peripheral. Hence, though we see about us much that is bad (details supplied), we see far more that is good (details supplied), for even in this life, the goodness of God keeps evil from getting the upper hand, and every good man will eventually say, with Dagny Taggart, "We never had to take any of it seriously, did we?"<sup>45</sup>

Dr. Branden follows his quotation by saying, "The misery of the human situation seemed to Augustine the cardinal and most overwhelming fact of life on earth."<sup>46</sup> He could scarcely have missed the point more completely.

Dr. Branden says the mystics profess compassion for the ills of mankind. But actually, they want to increase those ills, the better to ensnare people. In the nineteenth century, they tried to forbid the use of anæsthetics.<sup>47</sup>

I reply: It's fairly easy to make your opponents look silly, if you lump all the people who disagree with you together, and hold all of them responsible for anything said by any of them. Marxists usually do this by calling all non-Marxists (and indeed all Marxists not of the speaker's party) Fascists, and then by quoting anybody from Hitler to Gandhi to Bishop Pike to Joe Namath, they can establish the non-Marxist view on a particular question to be anything they please, and then show how sensible the Marxist view is by

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<sup>45</sup> *Atlas Shrugged*, page 653.

<sup>46</sup> *The Vision of Ayn Rand*, page 116.

<sup>47</sup> *The Vision of Ayn Rand*, page 118.

comparison. Dr. Branden, in calling all his opponents mystics, is guilty of the same confusing tactic.

Dr. Branden's remarks on mystics and anæsthesia were of special interest to me, because they reminded me of my own first encounter with Objectivism some years ago, in the person of a street-corner speaker in Berkeley. He said (approximate quote), No man who values his mind, his status as a rational, volitional being, will consent to fake reality in any way. He will never listen to those who suggest that when reality is unpleasant, it is all right to substitute a fantasy. He will never cloud or sully or destroy his mind with alcohol, or heroin, or LSD, or anæsthetics, or tranquilizers. No, not even for surgery. If the objective reality is that a surgeon is making an incision in his body, he will not evade in any way the full conscious awareness of that reality. Pain is a truthful signal that the body is being injured. He will not seek to block or distort that signal, but will integrate it into the context of his awareness that the net effect of the operation is to serve his rational self-interest. (Close approximate quote.)

I doubt that many of his listeners, especially those about to undergo major surgery, were convinced. And yet, I can sympathize with him. He was in a situation where the over-riding question was one of drugs, chiefly hallucinogens. He was under pressure to take a stand for or against them (a moral stand, not a legal one) and to justify it on a broad philosophical basis.

You may remember that the early anæsthetics, especially ether, were first popularized, not as anæsthetics, but as hallucinogens. People took them at parties, sniffed them very much as people now sniff glue. The notion that ether was something used to fake reality already had that context well established before ether came to be used for childbirth and surgery. Even a 1970s liberated woman might think twice about advising a woman to take LSD to help her through labor. (She might even speak up for natural childbirth, with no anæsthetic!) It is, I conclude, not surprising that a few clergymen wrote indignant letters to the *Times*, to the lasting joy of Dr. Branden and other anti-clericals. An Objectivist might have done the same thing. My first one would have.

For the last hour and more, I have been ignoring the forest for the trees. I have been going through Dr. Branden's speech and undertaking to answer it point by point. In closing, I should like to remind you of the main issue and add a postscript.

Ladies and gentlemen, you have minds. You are rational beings. If you are going to trust your minds, if you are going to trust them on a rational basis, you must hold a belief about the nature, the basis, and the origin of your minds that is logically consistent with such a trust. Theism is that belief. I have not attempted this evening to establish anything beyond the basic theist position. But anyone who comes to believe that God exists will not be content, if he is rational, to let the matter rest there. He will want to learn as much as he can on the point, both in terms of truth for its own sake and in terms of exploring the practical consequences for his own actions of this major aspect of reality.

I will suggest two avenues of exploration and then I am done. The first is historical. If, as I have undertaken to show, God exists and is interested in our knowing the truth about reality, then He may have taken steps to show men the truth about Himself. Accordingly, we may begin by asking how people who are theists came to believe in theism. And here it seems clear that the overwhelming majority of theists are Jews, Christians, or Moslems, or at least got their theism from contact with these religions or offshoots of these religions. This does not include all theists. Some philosophers have reasoned their way into theism by arguments like those we have considered or by other arguments. The Zoroastrians of Persia and India appear to be an independent development, and likewise the Egyptian Pharaoh Ikhnoton, and the tiny minority of Hindus who are theists rather than pantheists, although in all these cases Jewish, Christian, or Moslem influence is a plausible hypothesis. Then there are the numerous beliefs of primitive tribes scattered throughout the world, often difficult to classify, but often unmistakably monotheistic, and perhaps most clearly so among the most primitive and isolated. But for the most part, theistic beliefs are traceable to Jewish, Christian, or Moslem influence. And these three religions all trace their history back to the ancient Hebrew people. Jew, Christian, and Moslem alike regard Abraham, Moses, and David as among their spiritual forebears. A reasonable place, therefore, to begin looking for traces of God at work, increasing men's awareness of Himself, would be the history of Abraham, Moses, and David, or, if you prefer, the history of the Hebrew people and the intellectual development which resulted in their conviction that there was One God and that He had laid on them the special duty of proclaiming Him to the world.

The other avenue I should like to suggest is that of the artistic and creative imagination. You will see what I mean in a minute.

If we ask a Christian what is the central episode in the history of the universe, the event that most clearly reveals what reality is all about, he will presumably reply somewhat as follows: Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came down from Heaven to seek out, to rescue, and to claim for His own a number of persons who He intended should form a community united to Him in love. This community we call the Church, or, the Bride of Christ. Having come down to earth, He lived in obscurity for some years, and then began to proclaim publicly the Path of Life. He attracted attention at this point and people wanted to make Him king. He answered, "I am not interested in power on your terms. Your idea of power is incompatible with everything I have been talking about. At this point they turned against Him and crucified Him. He received five wounds: they pierced Him in the hands, and feet, and torso. Christians, believing that Christ made the world, find it ironic that those who put Him to death are His creatures, absolutely dependent on Him for their very existence, receiving from Him even the physical strength that enabled them to hammer the nails into His flesh. He recovered from this ordeal, and told His friends that, far from being a victory or near-victory, for the other side, this episode was His own great victory over the forces of evil and death. He said that by confronting Him, and doing its worst to Him, evil had defeated and destroyed itself, that the rest of the battle was only a mopping-up operation.

Let us turn from this to consider the answer that Ayn Rand might give if she were asked to tell us about the event, real or fictional, that sums up her philosophy, her sense of life, her judgement as to what reality is all about. She has in fact done so. We turn to what is undisputedly her greatest novel, *Atlas Shrugged*, and find the following:

The hero, John Galt, has his home in a mountain paradise, where unethical behavior is unknown, and where joy has utterly triumphed. He leaves that paradise to descend into the squalid, violent, chaotic, and justly doomed world below, in order to seek out and rescue and claim his bride. He lives there in obscurity for some time, and then begins to proclaim publicly the Path of Life. He attracts attention at this point, and people want to make him dictator. He answers, "I am not interested in power on your terms. Your idea of power is incompatible with everything I have been talking about." At this point they turn against him. They torture him, using a machine that can be adjusted to torment the left arm, right arm, left leg, right leg, torso, or any combination of the five. A touch of irony enters the picture, when the machine breaks down and he tells his tormentors how to repair it. We are

reminded that they are complete parasites, utterly dependent upon Galt and his kind for their transportation, their food, their machines, and even for their ability to torture Galt on this occasion. He recovers from this ordeal, and assures his friends that, far from being a victory, or near-victory, for the other side, this episode has been an essential element in their defeat — that by confronting him, and doing its worst to him, evil has defeated and destroyed itself, and that the rest of the battle is only a mopping-up operation. I pause to quote the relevant passage from the paperback *Atlas Shrugged*, page 1072:

Galt glanced at the faces around him; ... he knew in what manner they were now reliving his torture.

“It’s over,” he said. “Don’t make it worse for yourself than it was for me.”

Francisco turned his face away. “It’s only that it was you ...” he whispered. “*you* ... if it were anyone but you ...”

“But it had to be me, if they were to try their last, and they’ve tried, and” — he moved his hand, sweeping the room — and the meaning of those who had made it — into the wastelands of the past — “and that’s that.”

Francisco nodded....

A point which must not be overlooked in either account is the role of the Hero as Judge. A Christian might speak as follows: We Christians believe Christ to be the Judge of all men. When we say this, we are not thinking primarily of rewards and punishments, but of judgement as such. When we consider our own judgements, or those of our acquaintances, about ourselves, we hope that the unfavorable judgements are biased, and fear that the favorable ones may be. But eventually, or so we believe, every man will stand before Christ and receive an absolutely correct judgement about himself, which he will recognize as absolutely correct. There will be no room then for fudging or evasion, or for modesty. It will be either the best or the worst moment imaginable.

If we seek a parallel theme in Miss Rand’s novel, the search is not difficult. One after another, the people who become John Galt’s friends find their own sight clarified by his clear-sightedness, and in the light of his vision of the world and of them, find understanding of the world and acceptance of themselves. But we are also shown the other side of the coin. People who do not want to understand find that they cannot help doing so.

Robert Stadler and James Taggart, brought face to face with John Galt, realize that he understands them, and are driven by that realization to understand themselves. They blurt out how they feel about him, and so are faced with how they feel about life, and reality, and themselves. And under the weight of that knowledge, they collapse.

We see, then, that although Miss Rand is an avowed atheist, her basic metaphysical and epistemological principles presuppose theism, and that her creative imagination is basically Christian. When and whether her consciously avowed convictions about God will come into harmony with the rest of her thought is, of course, anybody's guess. On the one hand, given that irrationality now has a foothold in her mind in the form of her atheism, there is a real danger that the rot will spread — that, instead of becoming less atheistic, she will become less rational. To any agent of volitional consciousness — even Miss Rand — this option is always open. But if she consistently makes it her rule to focus on intellectual difficulties and not to evade them, then we who wish her well have every reason to be confident of the eventual outcome. Once again I turn to *Atlas Shrugged* for a parallel.

Those of you who have read the novel will remember that when Dagny visits Galt's mountain retreat for the first time, she agrees with his ultimate goals but is utterly opposed to his program for achieving them. She refuses to remain there, and returns to her job as a railroad executive, determined to fight to save the structure that Galt is trying to destroy. Before she leaves, Galt's friend and hers, Francisco, says to her (page 751), "Dagny, all three of us are in love with the same thing, no matter what its forms. Don't wonder why you feel no breach among us. You'll be one of us, so long as you remain in love with your rails and your engines — and they'll lead you back to us, no matter how many times you lose your way. The only man never to be redeemed is the man without passion."

So long as Miss Rand remains in love with reason, and honesty, and the power of man's mind to recognize the truth, she will not permanently lose her way. And when she does become a Christian, then and not before, she will know the real answer to the question, "Who is John Galt?" 