

John Galt's Speech from Ayn Rand's "Atlas Shrugged"

For twelve years, you have been asking: Who is John Galt? This is John Galt speaking. I am the man who loves his life. I am the man who does not sacrifice his love or his values. I am the man who has deprived you of victims and thus has destroyed your world, and if you wish to know why you are perishing—you who dread knowledge—I am the man who will now tell you.” The chief engineer was the only one able to move; he ran to a television set and struggled frantically with its dials. But the screen remained empty; the speaker had not chosen to be seen. Only his voice filled the airways of the country—of the world, thought the chief engineer—sounding as if he were speaking here, in this room, not to a group, but to one man; it was not the tone of addressing a meeting, but the tone of addressing a mind.

“You have heard it said that this is an age of moral crisis. You have said it yourself, half in fear, half in hope that the words had no meaning. You have cried that man’s sins are destroying the world and you have cursed human nature for its unwillingness to practice the virtues you demanded. Since virtue, to you, consists of sacrifice, you have demanded more sacrifices at every successive disaster. In the name of a return to morality, you have sacrificed all those evils which you held as the cause of your plight. You have sacrificed justice to mercy. You have sacrificed independence to unity. You have sacrificed reason to faith. You have sacrificed wealth to need. You have sacrificed self-esteem to self-denial. You have sacrificed happiness to duty.

“You have destroyed all that which you held to be evil and achieved all that which you held to be good. Why, then, do you shrink in horror from the sight of the world around you? That world is not the product of your sins, it is the product and the image of your virtues. It is your moral ideal brought into reality in its full and final perfection. You have fought for it, you have dreamed of it, and you have wished it, and I—I am the man who has granted you your wish.

“Your ideal had an implacable enemy, which your code of morality was designed to destroy. I have withdrawn that enemy. I have taken it out of your way and out of your reach. I have removed the source of all those evils you were sacrificing one by one. I have ended your battle. I have stopped your motor. I have deprived your world of man’s mind.

“Men do not live by the mind, you say? I have withdrawn those who do. The mind is impotent, you say? I have withdrawn those whose mind isn’t. There are values higher than the mind, you say? I have withdrawn those for whom there aren’t.

“While you were dragging to your sacrificial altars the men of justice, of independence, of reason, of wealth, of self-esteem—I beat you to it, I reached them first. I told them the nature of the game you were playing and the nature of that moral code of yours, which they had been too innocently generous to grasp. I showed them the way to live by another morality—mine. It is mine that they chose to follow.

“All the men who have vanished, the men you hated, yet dreaded to lose, it is I who have taken them away from you. Do not attempt to find us. We do not choose to be found. Do not cry that it is our duty to serve you. We do not recognize such duty. Do not cry that you need us. We do not consider need a claim. Do not cry that you own us. You don’t. Do not beg us to return. We are on strike, we, the men of the mind.

“We are on strike against self-immolation. We are on strike against the creed of unearned rewards and unrewarded duties. We are on strike against the dogma that the pursuit of one’s happiness is evil. We are on strike against the doctrine that life is guilt.

“There is a difference between our strike and all those you’ve practiced for centuries: our strike consists, not of making demands, but of granting them. We are evil, according to your morality. We have chosen not to harm you any longer. We are useless, according to your economics. We have chosen not to exploit you any longer. We are dangerous and to be shackled, according to your politics. We have chosen not to endanger you, nor to wear the shackles any longer. We are only an illusion, according to your philosophy. We have chosen not to blind you any longer and have left you free to face reality—the reality you wanted, the world as you see it now, a world without mind.

“We have granted you everything you demanded of us, we who had always been the givers, but have only now understood it. We have no demands to present to you, no terms to bargain about, no compromise to reach. You have nothing to offer us. *We do not need you.*

“Are you now crying: No, this was not what you wanted? A mindless world of ruins was not your goal? You did not want us to leave you? You moral cannibals, I know that you’ve always known what it was that you wanted. But your game is up, because *now* we know it, too.

“Through centuries of scourges and disasters, brought about by your code of morality, you have cried that your code had been broken, that the scourges were punishment for breaking it, that men were too weak and too selfish to spill all the blood it required. You damned man, you damned existence, you damned this earth, but never dared to question your code. Your victims took the blame and struggled on, with your curses as reward for their martyrdom—while you went on crying that your code was noble, but human nature was not good enough to practice it. And no one rose to ask the question: Good?—by what standard?

“You wanted to know John Galt’s identity. I am the man who has asked that question.

“Yes, this *is* an age of moral crisis. Yes, you *are* bearing punishment for your evil. But it is not man who is now on trial and it is not human nature that will take the blame. It is your moral code that’s through, this time. Your moral code has reached its climax, the blind alley at the end of its course. And if you wish to go on living, what you now need is not to *return* to morality—you who have never known any—but to *discover* it.

“You have heard no concepts of morality but the mystical or the social. You have been taught that morality is a code of behavior imposed on you by whim, the whim of a supernatural power or the whim of society, to serve God’s purpose or your neighbor’s welfare, to please an authority beyond the grave or else next door—but not to serve *your* life or pleasure. Your pleasure, you have been taught, is to be found in immorality, your interests would best be served by evil, and any moral code must be designed not *for* you, but *against* you, not to further your life, but to drain it.

“For centuries, the battle of morality was fought between those who claimed that your life belongs to God and those who claimed that it belongs to your neighbors—between those who preached that the good is self-sacrifice for the sake of ghosts in heaven and those who preached that the good is self-sacrifice for the sake of incompetents on earth. And no one came to say that your life belongs to you and that the good is to live it.

“Both sides agreed that morality demands the surrender of your self-interest and of your mind, that the moral and the practical are opposites, that morality is not the province of reason, but the province of faith and force. Both sides agreed that no rational morality is possible, that there is no right or wrong in reason—that in reason there’s no reason to be moral.

“Whatever else they fought about, it was against man’s mind that all your moralists have stood united. It was man’s mind that all their schemes and systems were intended to despoil and destroy. Now choose to perish or to learn that the anti-mind is the anti-life.

“Man’s mind is his basic tool of survival. Life is given to him, survival is not. His body is given to him, its sustenance is not. His mind is given to him, its content is not. To remain alive, he must act, and before he can act he must know the nature and purpose of his action. He cannot obtain his food without a knowledge of food and of the way to obtain it. He cannot dig a ditch-or build a cyclotron—without a knowledge of his aim and of the means to achieve it. To remain alive, he must think.

“But to think is an act of choice. The key to what you so recklessly call ‘human nature,’ the open secret you live with, yet dread to name, is the fact that *man is a being of volitional consciousness*. Reason does not work automatically; thinking is not a mechanical process; the connections of logic are not made by instinct. The function of your stomach, lungs or heart is automatic; the function of your mind is not. In any hour and issue of your life, you are free to think or to evade that effort. But you are not free to escape from your nature, from the fact that *reason* is your means of survival—so that for *you*, who are a human being, the question ‘to be or not to be’ is the question ‘to’ think or not to think.’

“A being of volitional consciousness has no automatic course of behavior. He needs a code of values to guide his actions. ‘Value’ is that which one acts to gain and keep, ‘virtue’ is the action by which one gains and keeps it. ‘Value’ presupposes an answer to the question: of value to whom and for what? ‘Value’ presupposes a standard, a purpose and the necessity of action in the face of an alternative. Where there are no alternatives, no values are possible.

“There is only one fundamental alternative in the universe: existence or non-existence—and it pertains to a single class of entities: to living organisms. The existence of inanimate matter is unconditional, the existence of life is not; it depends on a specific course of action. Matter is indestructible, it changes its forms, but it cannot cease to exist. It is only a living organism that faces a constant alternative: the issue of life or death. Life is a process of self-sustaining and-self-generated action. If an organism fails in that action, it does; its chemical elements remain, but its life goes out of existence. It is only the concept of ‘Life’ that makes the concept of ‘Value’ possible. It is only to a living entity that things can be good or evil.

“A plant must feed itself in order to live; the sunlight, the water, the chemicals it needs are the values its nature has set it to pursue; its life is the standard of value directing its actions. But a plant

has no choice of action; there are alternatives in the conditions it encounters, but there is no alternative in its function: it acts automatically to further its life, it cannot act for its own destruction.

“An animal is equipped for sustaining its life; its senses provide it with an automatic code of action, an automatic knowledge of what is good for it or evil. It has no power to extend its knowledge or to evade it. In conditions where its knowledge proves inadequate, it dies. But so long as it lives, it acts on its knowledge, with automatic safety and no power of choice, it is unable to ignore its own good, unable to decide to choose the evil and act as its own destroyer.

“Man has no automatic code of survival. His particular distinction from all other living species is the necessity to act in the face of alternatives by means of *volitional choice*. He has no automatic knowledge of what is good for him or evil, what values his life depends on, what course of action it requires. Are you prattling about an instinct of self-preservation? An *instinct* of self-preservation is precisely what man does not possess. An ‘instinct’ is an unerring and automatic form of knowledge. A desire is not an instinct. A desire to live does not give you the knowledge required for living. And even man’s desire to live is not automatic: your secret evil today is that *that* is the desire you do not hold. Your fear of death is not a love of life and will not give you the knowledge needed to keep it. Man must obtain his knowledge and choose his actions by a process of thinking, which nature will not force him to perform. Man has the power to act as his own destroyer—and that is the way he has acted through most of his history.

“A living entity that regarded its means of survival as evil, would not survive. A plant that struggled to mangle its roots, a bird that fought to break its wings would not remain for long in the existence they affronted. But the history of man has been a struggle to deny and to destroy his mind.

“Man has been called a rational being, but rationality is a matter of choice—and the alternative his nature offers him is: rational being or suicidal animal. Man has to be man—by choice; he has to hold his life as a value—by choice: he has to learn to sustain it—by choice; he has to discover the values it requires and practice his virtues—by choice.

“A code of values accepted by choice is a code of morality.

“Whoever you are, you who are hearing me now, I am speaking to whatever living remnant is left uncorrupted within you, to the remnant of the human, to your *mind*, and I say: There *is* a morality of reason, a morality proper to man, and *Man’s Life* is its standard of value.

“All that which is proper to the life of a rational being is the good; all that which destroys it is the evil.

“Man’s life, as required by his nature, is not the life of a mindless brute, of a looting thug or a mooching mystic, but the life of a thinking being—not life by means of force or fraud, but life by means of achievement—not survival at any price, since there’s only one price that pays for man’s survival: reason.

“Man’s life is the *standard* of morality, but your own life is its *purpose*. If existence on earth is your goal, you must choose your actions and values by the standard of that which is proper to man—for the purpose of preserving, fulfilling and enjoying the irreplaceable value which is your life.

“Since life requires a specific course of action, any other course will destroy it. A being who does not hold his own life as the motive and goal of his actions, is acting on the motive and standard of *death*. Such a being is a metaphysical monstrosity, struggling to oppose, negate and contradict the fact of his own existence, running blindly amuck on a trail of destruction, capable of nothing but pain.

“Happiness is the successful state of life, pain is an agent of death. Happiness is that state of consciousness which proceeds from the achievement of one’s values. A morality that dares to tell you to find happiness in the renunciation of your happiness—to value the failure of your values—is an insolent negation of morality. A doctrine that gives you, as an ideal, the role of a sacrificial animal seeking slaughter on the altars of others, is giving you *death* as your standard. By the grace of reality and the nature of life, man—every man—is an end in himself, he exists for his own sake, and the achievement of his own happiness is his highest moral purpose.

“But neither life nor happiness can be achieved by the pursuit of irrational whims. Just as man is free to attempt to survive in any random manner, but will perish unless he lives as his nature requires, so he is free to seek his happiness in any mindless fraud, but the torture of frustration is all he will find, unless he seeks the happiness proper to man. The purpose of morality is to teach you, not to suffer and die, but to enjoy yourself and live.

“Sweep aside those parasites of subsidized classrooms, who live on the profits of the mind of others and proclaim that man needs no morality, no values, no code of behavior. They, who pose as scientists and claim that man is only an animal, do not grant him inclusion in the law of existence they have granted to the lowest of insects. They recognize that every living species has a way of survival demanded by its nature, they do not claim that a fish can live out of water or that a dog can live without its sense of smell—but man, they claim, the most complex of beings, man can survive in any way whatever, man has no identity, no nature, and there’s no practical reason why he cannot live with his means of survival destroyed, with his mind throttled and placed at the disposal of any orders *they* might care to issue.

“Sweep aside those hatred-eaten mystics, who pose as friends of humanity and preach that the highest virtue man can practice is to hold his own life as of no value. Do they tell you that the purpose of morality is to curb man’s instinct of self-preservation? It is for the purpose of self-preservation that man needs a code of morality. The only man who desires to be moral is the man who desires to live.

“No, you do not have to live; it is your basic act of choice; but if you choose to live,. you must live as a man—by the work and the judgment of your mind.

“No, you do not have to live as a man; it is an act of moral choice. But you cannot live as anything else—and the alternative is that state of living death which you now see within you and around you, the state of a thing unfit for existence, no longer human and less than animal, a thing that knows nothing but pain and drags itself through its span of years in the agony of unthinking self-destruction.

“No, you do not have to think; it is an act of moral choice. But someone had to think to keep you alive; if you choose to default, you default on existence and you pass the deficit to some moral man, expecting him to sacrifice his good for the sake of letting you survive by your evil.

“No, you do not have to be a man; but today those who are, are not there any longer. I have removed your means of survival—your victims.

“If you wish to know how I have done it and what I told them to make them quit, you are hearing it now. I told them, in essence, the statement I am making tonight. They were men who had lived by my code, but had not known how great a virtue it represented. I made them see it. I brought them, not a re-evaluation, but only an identification of their values.

“We, the men of the mind, are now on strike against you in the name of a single axiom, which is the root of our moral code, just as the root of yours is the wish to escape it: the axiom that *existence exists*.

“Existence exists—and the act of grasping that statement implies two corollary axioms: that something exists which one perceives and that one exists possessing consciousness, consciousness being the faculty of perceiving that which exists.

“If nothing exists, there can be no consciousness: a consciousness with nothing to be conscious of is a contradiction in terms. A consciousness conscious of nothing but itself is a contradiction in terms: before it could identify itself as consciousness, it had to be conscious of something. If that which you claim to perceive does not exist, what you possess is not consciousness.

“Whatever the degree of your knowledge, these two—existence and consciousness—are axioms you cannot escape, these two are the irreducible primaries implied in any action you undertake, in any part of your knowledge and in its sum, from the first ray of light you perceive at the start of your life to the widest erudition you might acquire at its end. Whether you know the shape of a pebble or the structure of a solar system, the axioms remain the same: that *it* exists and that you *know* it.

“To exist is to be something, as distinguished from the nothing of non-existence, it is to be an entity of a specific nature made of specific attributes. Centuries ago, the man who was—no matter what his errors—the greatest of your philosophers, has stated the formula defining the concept of existence and the rule of all knowledge: *A is A*. A thing is itself. You have never grasped the meaning of his statement. I am here to complete it: Existence is Identity, Consciousness is Identification.

“Whatever you choose to consider, be it an object, an attribute or an action, the law of identity remains the same. A leaf cannot be a stone at the same time, it cannot be all red and all green at the same time, it cannot freeze and burn at the same time. *A is A*. Or, if you wish it stated in simpler language: You cannot have your cake and eat it, too.

“Are you seeking to know what is wrong with the world? All the disasters that have wrecked your world, came from your leaders’ attempt to evade the fact that *A is A*. All the secret evil you dread to face within you and all the pain you have ever endured, came from your own attempt to evade the fact that *A is A*. The purpose of those who taught you to evade it, was to make you forget that Man is Man.

“Man cannot survive except by gaining knowledge, and reason is his only means to gain it. Reason is the faculty that perceives, identifies and integrates the material provided by his senses. The task of his senses is to give him the evidence of existence, but the task of identifying it belongs to his reason, his senses tell him only that something *is*, but *what* it is must be learned by his mind.

“All thinking is a process of identification and integration. Man perceives a blob of color; by integrating the evidence of his sight and his touch, he learns to identify it as a solid object; he learns to identify the object as a table; he learns that the table is made of wood; he learns that the wood

consists of cells, that the cells consist of molecules, that the molecules consist of atoms. All through this process, the work of his mind consists of answers to a single question: *What* is it? His means to establish the truth of his answers is logic, and logic rests on the axiom that existence exists. Logic is the art of *non-contradictory identification*. A contradiction cannot exist. An atom is itself, and so is the universe; neither can contradict its own identity; nor can a part contradict the whole. No concept man forms is valid unless he integrates it without contradiction into the total sum of his knowledge. To arrive at a contradiction is to confess an error in one's thinking; to maintain a contradiction is to abdicate one's mind and to evict oneself from the realm of reality.

"Reality is that which exists; the unreal does not exist; the unreal is merely that negation of existence which is the content of a human consciousness when it attempts to abandon reason. Truth is the recognition of reality; reason, man's only means of knowledge, is his only standard of truth.

"The most depraved sentence you can now utter is to ask: *Whose* reason? The answer is: *Yours*. No matter how vast your knowledge or how modest, it is your own mind that has to acquire it. It is only with your own knowledge that you can deal. It is only your own knowledge that you can claim to possess or ask others to consider. Your mind is your only judge of truth—and if others dissent from your verdict, reality is the court of final appeal. Nothing but a man's mind can perform that complex, delicate, crucial process of identification which is thinking. Nothing can direct the process but his own judgment. Nothing can direct his judgment but his moral integrity.

"You who speak of a 'moral instinct' as if it were some separate endowment opposed to reason—man's reason *is* his moral faculty. A process of reason is a process of constant choice in answer to the question: True or False?—*Right or Wrong*? Is a seed to be planted in soil in order to grow—right or wrong? Is a man's wound to be disinfected in order to save his life—right or wrong? Does the nature of atmospheric electricity permit it to be converted into kinetic power—right or wrong? It is the answers to such questions that gave you everything you have—and the answers came from a man's mind, a mind of intransigent devotion to that which is *right*.

"A rational process is a *moral* process. You may make an error at any step of it, with nothing to protect you but your own severity, or you may try to cheat, to fake the evidence and evade the effort of the quest—but if devotion to truth is the hallmark of morality, then there is no greater, nobler, more heroic form of devotion than the act of a man who assumes the responsibility of thinking.

"That which you call your soul or spirit is your consciousness, and that which you call 'free will' is your mind's freedom to think or not, the only will you have, your only freedom, the choice that controls all the choices you make and determines your life and your character.

"Thinking is man's only basic virtue, from which all the others proceed. And his basic vice, the source of all his evils, is that nameless act which all of you practice, but struggle never to admit: the act of blanking out, the willful suspension of one's consciousness, the refusal to think—not blindness, but the refusal to see; not ignorance, but the refusal to know. It is the act of unfocusing your mind and inducing an inner fog to escape the responsibility of judgment—on the unstated premise that a thing will not exist if only you refuse to identify it, that A will not be A so long as you do not pronounce the verdict 'It *is*.' Non-thinking is an act of annihilation, a wish to negate existence, an attempt to wipe out reality. But existence exists; reality is not to be wiped out, it will merely wipe out the wiper. By refusing to say 'It *is*,' you are refusing to say 'I *am*.' By suspending your judgment, you are negating your person. When a man declares: 'Who am I to know?'—he is declaring: 'Who am I to live?'

“This, in every hour and every issue, is your basic moral choice: thinking or non-thinking, existence or non-existence, A or non-A, entity or zero.

“To the extent to which a man is rational, life is the premise directing his actions. To the extent to which he is irrational, the premise directing his actions is death.

“You who prattle that morality is social and that man would need no morality on a desert island—it is on a desert island that he would need it most. Let him try to claim, when there are no victims to pay for it, that a rock is a house, that sand is clothing, that food will drop into his mouth without cause or effort, that he will collect a harvest tomorrow by devouring his stock seed today—and reality will wipe him out, as he deserves; reality will show him that life is a value to be bought and that thinking is the only coin noble enough to buy it.

“If I were to speak your kind of language, I would say that man’s only moral commandment is: Thou shalt think. But a ‘moral commandment’ is a contradiction in terms. The moral is the chosen, not the forced; the understood, not the obeyed. The moral is the rational, and reason accepts no commandments.

“My morality, the morality of reason, is contained in a single axiom: existence exists—and in a single choice: to live. The rest proceeds from these. To live, man must hold three things as the supreme and ruling values of his life: Reason—Purpose—Self-esteem. Reason, as his only tool of knowledge—Purpose, as his choice of the happiness which that tool must proceed to achieve—Self-esteem, as his inviolate certainty that his mind is competent to think and his person is worthy of happiness, which means: is worthy of living. These three values imply and require all of man’s virtues, and all his virtues pertain to the relation of existence and consciousness: rationality, independence, integrity, honesty, justice, productiveness, pride.

“Rationality is the recognition of the fact that existence exists, that nothing can alter the truth and nothing can take precedence over that act of perceiving it, which is thinking—that the mind is one’s only judge of values and one’s only guide of action—that reason is an absolute that permits no compromise—that a concession to the irrational invalidates one’s consciousness and turns it from the task of perceiving to the task of faking reality—that the alleged short-cut to knowledge, which is faith, is only a short-circuit destroying the mind—that the acceptance of a mystical invention is a wish for the annihilation of existence and, properly, annihilates one’s consciousness.

“Independence is the recognition of the fact that yours is the responsibility of judgment and nothing can help you escape it—that no substitute can do your thinking, as no pinch-hitter can live your life—that the vilest form of self-abasement and self-destruction is the subordination of your mind to the mind of another, the acceptance of an authority over your brain, the acceptance of his assertions as facts, his say-so as truth, his edicts as middle-man between your consciousness and your existence.

“Integrity is the recognition of the fact that you cannot fake your consciousness, just as honesty is the recognition of the fact that you cannot fake existence—that man is an indivisible entity, an integrated unit of two attributes: of matter and consciousness, and that he may permit no breach between body and mind, between action and thought, between his life and his convictions—that, like a judge impervious to public opinion, he may not sacrifice his convictions to the wishes of others, be it the whole of mankind shouting pleas or threats against him—that courage and confidence are

practical necessities, that courage is the practical form of being true to existence, of being true to one's own consciousness.

"Honesty is the recognition of the fact that the unreal is unreal and can have no value, that neither love nor fame nor cash is a value if obtained by fraud—that an attempt to gain a value by deceiving the mind of others is an act of raising your victims to a position higher than reality, where you become a pawn of their blindness, a slave of their non-thinking and their evasions, while their intelligence, their rationality, their perceptiveness become the enemies you have to dread and flee—that you do not care to live as a dependent, least of all a dependent on the stupidity of others, or as a fool whose source of values is the fools he succeeds in fooling—that honesty is not a social duty, not a sacrifice for the sake of others, but the most profoundly selfish virtue man can practice: his refusal to sacrifice the reality of his own existence to the deluded consciousness of others.

"Justice is the recognition of the fact that you cannot fake the character of men as you cannot fake the character of nature, that you must judge all men as conscientiously as you judge inanimate objects, with the same respect for truth, with the same incorruptible vision, by as pure and as *rational* a process of identification—that every man must be judged for what he *is* and treated accordingly, that just as you do not pay a higher price for a rusty chunk of scrap than for a piece of shining metal, so you do not value a totter above a hero—that your moral appraisal is the coin paying men for their virtues or vices, and this payment demands of you as scrupulous an honor as you bring to financial transactions—that to withhold your contempt from men's vices is an act of moral counterfeiting, and to withhold your admiration from their virtues is an act of moral embezzlement—that to place any other concern higher than justice is to devalue your moral currency and defraud the good in favor of the evil, since only the good can lose by a default of justice and only the evil can profit—and that the bottom of the pit at the end of that road, the act of moral bankruptcy, is to punish men for their virtues and reward them for their vices, that that is the collapse to full depravity, the Black Mass of the worship of death, the dedication of your consciousness to the destruction of existence.

"Productiveness is your acceptance of morality, your recognition of the fact that you choose to live—that productive work is the process by which man's consciousness controls his existence, a constant process of acquiring knowledge and shaping matter to fit one's purpose, of translating an idea into physical form, of remaking the earth in the image of one's values—that *all* work is creative work if done by a thinking mind, and no work is creative if done by a blank who repeats in uncritical stupor a routine he has learned from others—that your work is yours to choose, and the choice is as wide as your mind, that nothing more is possible to you and nothing less is human—that to cheat your way into a job bigger than your mind can handle is to become a fear-corroded ape on borrowed motions and borrowed time, and to settle down into a job that requires less than your mind's full capacity is to cut your motor and sentence yourself to another kind of motion: decay—that your work is the process of achieving your values, and to lose your ambition for values is to lose your ambition to live—that your body is a machine, but your mind is its driver, and you must drive as far as your mind will take you, with achievement as the goal of your road—that the man who has no purpose is a machine that coasts downhill at the mercy of any boulder to crash in the first chance ditch, that the man who stifles his mind is a stalled machine slowly going to rust, that the man who lets a leader prescribe his course is a wreck being towed to the scrap heap, and the man who makes another man his goal is a hitchhiker no driver should ever pick up—that your work is the purpose of your life, and you must speed past any killer who assumes the right to stop you, that any value you might find

outside your work, any other loyalty or love, can be only travelers you choose to share your journey and must be travelers going on their own power in the same direction.

“Pride is the recognition of the fact that you are your own highest value and, like all of man’s values, it has to be earned—that of any achievements open to you, the one that makes all others possible is the creation of your own character—that your character, your actions, your desires, your emotions are the products of the premises held by your mind—that as man must produce the physical values he needs to sustain his life, so he must acquire the values of character that make his life worth sustaining—that as man is a being of self-made wealth, so he is a being of self-made soul—that to live requires a sense of self-value, but man, who has no automatic values, has no automatic sense of self-esteem and must earn it by shaping his soul in the image of his moral ideal, in the image of Man, the rational being he is born able to create, but must create by choice—that the first precondition of self-esteem is that radiant selfishness of soul which desires the best in all things, in values of matter and spirit, a soul that seeks above all else to achieve its own moral perfection, valuing nothing higher than itself—and that the proof of an achieved self-esteem is your soul’s shudder of contempt and rebellion against the role of a sacrificial animal, against the vile impertinence of any creed that proposes to immolate the irreplaceable value which is your consciousness and the incomparable glory which is your existence to the blind evasions and the stagnant decay of others.

“Are you beginning to see who is John Galt? I am the man who has earned the thing you did not fight for, the thing you have renounced, betrayed, corrupted, yet were unable fully to destroy and are now hiding as your guilty secret, spending your life in apologies to every professional cannibal, lest it be discovered that somewhere within you, you still long to say what I am now saying to the hearing of the whole of mankind: I am proud of my own value and of the fact that I wish to live.

“This wish—which you share, yet submerge as an evil—is the only remnant of the good within you, but it is a wish one must learn to deserve. His own happiness is man’s only moral purpose, but only his own virtue can achieve it. Virtue is not an end in itself. Virtue is not its own reward or sacrificial fodder for the reward of evil. *Life* is the reward of virtue—and happiness is the goal and the reward of life.

“Just as your body has two fundamental sensations, pleasure and pain, as signs of its welfare or injury, as a barometer of its basic alternative, life or death, so your consciousness has two fundamental emotions, joy and suffering, in answer to the same alternative. Your emotions are estimates of that which furthers your life or threatens it, lightning calculators giving you a sum of your profit or loss. You have no choice about your capacity to feel that something is good for you or evil, but *what* you will consider good or evil, what will give you joy or pain, what you will love or hate, desire or fear, depends on your standard of value. Emotions are inherent in your nature, but their content is dictated by your mind. Your emotional capacity is an empty motor, and your values are the fuel with which your mind fills it. If you choose a mix of contradictions, it will clog your motor, corrode your transmission and wreck you on your first attempt to move with a machine which you, the driver, have corrupted.

“If you hold the irrational as your standard of value and the impossible as your concept of the good, if you long for rewards you have not earned, for a fortune, or a love you don’t deserve, for a loophole in the law of causality, for an A that becomes non-A at your whim, if you desire the opposite of existence—you will reach it. Do not cry, when you reach it, that life is frustration and that happiness is impossible to man; check your fuel: it brought you where you wanted to go.

“Happiness is not to be achieved at the command of emotional whims. Happiness is not the satisfaction of whatever irrational wishes you might blindly attempt to indulge. Happiness is a state of non-contradictory joy—a joy without penalty or guilt, a joy that does not clash with any of your values and does not work for your own destruction, not the joy of escaping from your mind, but of using your mind’s fullest power, not the joy of faking reality, but of achieving values that are real, not the joy of a drunkard, but of a producer. Happiness is possible only to a rational man, the man who desires nothing but rational goals, seeks nothing but rational values and finds his joy in nothing but rational actions.

“Just as I support my life, neither by robbery nor alms, but by my own effort, so I do not seek to derive my happiness from the injury or the favor of others, but earn it by my own achievement. Just as I do not consider the pleasure of others as the goal of my life, so I do not consider my pleasure as the goal of the lives of others. Just as there are no contradictions in my values and no conflicts among my desires—so there are no victims and no conflicts of interest among rational men, men who do not desire the unearned and do not view one another with a cannibal’s lust, men who neither make sacrifice nor accept them.

“The symbol of all relationships among such men, the moral symbol of respect for human beings, is *the trader*. We, who live by values, not by loot, are traders, both in matter and in spirit. A trader is a man who earns what he gets and does not give or take the undeserved. A trader does not ask to be paid for his failures, nor does he ask to be loved for his flaws. A trader does not squander his body as fodder or his soul as alms. Just as he does not give his work except in trade for material values, so he does not give the values of his spirit—his love, his friendship, his esteem—except in payment and in trade for human virtues, in payment for his own selfish pleasure, which he receives from men he can respect. The mystic parasites who have, throughout the ages, reviled the traders and held them in contempt, while honoring the beggars and the looters, have known the secret motive of their sneers: a trader is the entity they dread—a man of justice.

“Do you ask what moral obligation I owe to my fellow men? None—except the obligation I owe to myself, to material objects and to all of existence: rationality. I deal with men as my nature and their demands: by means of reason. I seek or desire nothing from them except such relations as they care to enter of their own voluntary choice. It is only with their mind that I can deal and only for my own self-interest, when they see that my interest coincides with theirs. When they don’t, I enter no relationship; I let dissenters go their way and I do not swerve from mine. I win by means of nothing but logic and I surrender to nothing but logic. I do not surrender my reason or deal with men who surrender theirs. I have nothing to gain from fools or cowards; I have no benefits to seek from human vices: from stupidity, dishonesty or fear. The only value men can offer me is the work of their mind. When I disagree with a rational man, I let reality be our final arbiter; if I am right, he will learn; if I am wrong, I will; one of us will win, but both will profit.

“Whatever may be open to disagreement, there is one act of evil that may not, the act that no man may commit against others and no man may sanction or forgive. So long as men desire to live together, no man may *initiate*—do you hear me? no man may *start*—the use of physical force against others.

“To interpose the threat of physical destruction between a man and his perception of reality, is to negate and paralyze his means of survival; to force-him to act against his own judgment, is like forcing him to act against his own sight. Whoever, to whatever purpose or extent, initiates the use of

force, is a killer acting on the premise of death in a manner wider than murder: the premise of destroying man's capacity to live.

"Do not open your mouth to tell me that your mind has convinced you of your right to force my mind. Force and mind are opposites; morality ends where a gun begins. When you declare that men are irrational animals and propose to treat them as such, you define thereby your own character and can no longer claim the sanction of reason—as no advocate of contradictions can claim it. There can be no 'right' to destroy the source of rights, the only means of judging right and wrong: the mind.

"To force a man to drop his own mind and to accept your will as a substitute, with a gun in place of a syllogism, with terror in place of proof, and death as the final argument—is to attempt to exist in defiance of reality. Reality demands of man that he act for his own rational interest; your gun demands of him that he act against it. Reality threatens man with death if he does not act on his rational judgment: you threaten him with death if he does. You place him into a world where the price of his life is the surrender of all the virtues required by life—and death by a process of gradual destruction is all that you and your system will achieve, when death is made to be the ruling power, the winning argument in a society of men.

"Be it a highwayman who confronts a traveler with the ultimatum: 'Your money or your life,' or a politician who confronts a country with the ultimatum: 'Your children's education or your life,' the meaning of that ultimatum is: 'Your mind or your life'—and neither is possible to man without the other.

"If there are degrees of evil, it is hard to say who is the more contemptible: the brute who assumes the right to force the mind of others or the moral degenerate who grants to others the right to force his mind. *That* is the moral absolute one does not leave open to debate. I do not grant the terms of reason to men who propose to deprive me of reason. I do not enter discussions with neighbors who think they can forbid me to think. I do not place my moral sanction upon a murderer's wish to kill me. When a man attempts to deal with me by force, I answer him—by force.

"It is only as retaliation that force may be used and only against the man who starts its use. No, I do not share his evil or sink to his concept of morality: I merely grant him his choice, destruction, the only destruction he had the right to choose: his own. He uses force to seize a value; I use it only to destroy destruction. A holdup man seeks to gain wealth by killing me; I do not grow richer by killing a holdup man. I seek no values by means of evil, nor do I surrender my values to evil.

"In the name of all the producers who had kept you alive and received your death ultimatums in payment, I now answer you with a single ultimatum of our own: Our work or your guns. You can choose either; you can't have both. We do not initiate the use of force against others or submit to force at their hands. If you desire ever again to live in an industrial society, it will be on *our* moral terms. Our terms and our motive power are the antithesis of yours. You have been using fear as your weapon and have been bringing death to man as his punishment for rejecting your morality. We offer him life as his reward for accepting ours.

"You who are worshippers of the zero—you have never discovered that achieving life is not the equivalent of avoiding death. Joy is not 'the absence of pain,' intelligence is not 'the absence of stupidity,' light is not 'the absence of darkness,' an entity is not 'the absence of a nonentity.' Building is not done by abstaining from demolition; centuries of sitting and waiting in such abstinence will not

raise one single girder for you to abstain from demolishing—and now you can no longer say to me, the builder: ‘Produce, and feed us in exchange for our *not* destroying your production.’ I am answering in the name of all your victims: Perish with and in your own void. Existence is not a negation of negatives. Evil, not value, is an absence and a negation, evil is impotent and has no power but that which we let it extort from us. Perish, because we have learned that a zero cannot hold a mortgage over life.

“You seek escape from pain. We seek the achievement of happiness. You exist for the sake of avoiding punishment. We exist for the sake of earning rewards. Threats will not make us function; fear is not our incentive. It is not death that we wish to avoid, but life that we wish to live.

“You, who have lost the concept of the difference, you who claim that fear and joy are incentives of equal power—and secretly add that fear is the more ‘practical’—you do not wish to live, and only fear of death still holds you to the existence you have damned. You dart in panic through the trap of your days, looking for the exit you have closed, running from a pursuer you dare not name to a terror you dare not acknowledge, and the greater your terror the greater your dread of the only act that could save you: thinking. The purpose of your struggle is not to know, not to grasp or name or hear the thing. I shall now state to your hearing: that yours is the Morality of Death.

“Death is the standard of your values, death is your chosen goal, and you have to keep running, since there is no escape from the pursuer who is out to destroy you or from the knowledge that that pursuer is yourself. Stop running, for once—there is no place to run—stand naked, as you dread to stand, but as I see you, and take a look at what you dared to call a moral code.

“Damnation is the start of your morality, destruction is its purpose, means and end. Your code begins by damning man as evil, then demands that he practice a good which it defines as impossible for him to practice. It demands, as his first proof of virtue, that he accept his own depravity without proof. It demands that he start, not with a standard of value, but with a standard of evil, which is himself, by means of which he is then to define the good: the good is that which he is not.

“It does not matter who then becomes the profiteer on his renounced glory and tormented soul, a mystic God with some incomprehensible design or any passer-by whose rotting sores are held as some inexplicable claim upon him—it does not matter, the good is not for him to understand, his duty is to crawl through years of penance, atoning for the guilt of his existence to any stray collector of unintelligible debts, his only concept of a value is a zero: the good is that which is non-man.

“The name of this monstrous absurdity is Original Sin.

“A sin without volition is a slap at morality and an insolent contradiction in terms: that which is outside the possibility of choice is outside the province of morality. If man is evil by birth, he has no will, no power to change it; if he has no will, he can be neither good nor evil; a robot is amoral. To hold, as man’s sin, a fact not open to his choice is a mockery of morality. To hold man’s nature as his sin is a mockery of nature. To punish him for a crime he committed before he was born is a mockery of justice. To hold him guilty in a matter where no innocence exists is a mockery of reason. To destroy morality, nature, justice and reason by means of a single concept is a feat of evil hardly to be matched. Yet *that* is the root of your code.

“Do not hide behind the cowardly evasion that man is born with free will, but with a ‘tendency’ to evil. A free will saddled with a tendency is like a game with loaded dice. It forces man to struggle through the effort of playing, to bear responsibility and pay for the game, but the decision is weighted in favor of a tendency that he had no power to escape. If the tendency is of his choice, he cannot possess it at birth; if it is not of his choice, his will is not free.

“What is the nature of the guilt that your teachers call his Original Sin? What are the evils man acquired when he fell from a state they consider perfection? Their myth declares that he ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge—he acquired a mind and became a rational being. It was the knowledge of good and evil—he became a mortal being. He was sentenced to earn his bread by his labor—he became a productive being. He was sentenced to experience desire—he acquired the capacity of sexual enjoyment. The evils for which they damn him are reason, morality, creativeness; joy—all the cardinal values of his existence. It is not his vices that their myth of man’s fall is designed to explain and condemn, it is not his errors that they hold as his guilt, but the essence of his nature as man. Whatever he was—that robot in the Garden of Eden, who existed without mind, without values, without labor, without love—he was not man.

“Man’s fall, according to your teachers, was that he gained the virtues required to live. These virtues, by their standard, are his Sin. His evil, they charge, is that he’s man. His guilt, they charge, is that he lives.

“They call it a morality of mercy and a doctrine of love for man. No, they say, they do not preach that man is evil, the evil is only that alien object: his body. No, they say, they do not wish to kill him, they only wish to make him lose his body. They seek to help him, they say, against his pain—and they point at the torture rack to which they’ve tied him, the rack with two wheels that pull him in opposite directions, the rack of the doctrine that splits his soul and body.

“They have cut man in two, setting one half against the other. They have taught him that his body and his consciousness are two enemies engaged in deadly conflict, two antagonists of opposite natures, contradictory claims, incompatible needs, that to benefit one is to injure the other, that his soul belongs to a supernatural realm, but his body is an evil prison holding it in bondage to this earth—and that the good is to defeat his body, to undermine it by years of patient struggle, digging his way to that gorgeous jail-break which leads into the freedom of the grave.

“They have taught man that he is a hopeless misfit made of two elements, both symbols of death. A body without a soul is a corpse, a soul without a body is a ghost—yet such is their image of man’s nature: the battleground of a struggle between a corpse and a ghost, a corpse endowed with some evil volition of its own and a ghost endowed with the knowledge that everything known to man is nonexistent, that only the unknowable exists.

“Do you observe what human faculty that’ doctrine was designed to ignore? It was man’s mind that had to be negated in order to make him fall apart. Once he surrendered reason, he was left at the mercy of two monsters whom he could not fathom or control: of a body moved by unaccountable instincts and of a soul moved by mystic revelations—he was left as the passively ravaged victim of a battle between a robot and a dictaphone.

“And as he now crawls through the wreckage, groping blindly for a way to live, your teachers offer him the help of a morality that proclaims that he’ll find no solution and must seek no fulfillment on

earth. Real existence, they tell him, is that which he cannot perceive, true consciousness is the faculty of perceiving the non-existent—and if he is unable to understand it, *that* is the proof that his existence is evil and his consciousness impotent.

“As products of the split between man’s soul and body, there are two kinds of teachers of the Morality of Death: the mystics of spirit and the mystics of muscle, whom you call the spiritualists and the materialists, those who believe in consciousness without existence and those who believe in existence without consciousness. Both demand the surrender of your mind, one to their revelation, the other to their reflexes. No matter how loudly they posture in the roles of irreconcilable antagonists, their moral codes are alike, and so are their aims: in matter—the enslavement of man’s body, in spirit—the destruction of his mind.

“The good, say the mystics of spirit, is God, a being whose only definition is that he is beyond man’s power to conceive—a definition that invalidates man’s consciousness and nullifies his concepts of existence. The good, say the mystics of muscle, is Society—a thing which they define as an organism that possesses no physical form, a super-being embodied in no one in particular and everyone in general except yourself. Man’s mind, say the mystics of spirit, must be subordinated to the will of God. Man’s mind, say the mystics of muscle, must be subordinated to the will of Society. Man’s standard of value say the mystics of spirit, is the pleasure Of God, whose standards are beyond man’s power of comprehension and must be accepted on faith. Man’s standard of value, say the mystics of muscle, is the pleasure of Society, whose standards are beyond man’s right of judgment and must be obeyed as a primary absolute. The purpose of man’s life, say both, is to become an abject zombie who serves a purpose he does not know, for reasons he is not to question. His reward, say the mystics of spirit, will be given to him beyond the grave. His reward, say the mystics of muscle, will be given on earth—to his great-grandchildren.

“*Selfishness*—say both—is man’s evil. Man’s good—say both—is to give up his personal desires, to deny himself, renounce himself, surrender; man’s good is to negate the life he lives. *Sacrifice*—cry both—is the essence of morality, the highest virtue within man’s reach.

“Whoever is now within reach of my voice, whoever is man the victim, not man the killer, I am speaking at the deathbed of your mind, at the brink of that darkness in which you’re drowning, and if there still remains within you the power to struggle to hold on to those fading sparks which had been yourself—use it now. The word that has destroyed you is ‘*sacrifice*.’ Use the last of your strength to understand its meaning. You’re still alive. You have a chance.

“‘Sacrifice’ does not mean the rejection of the worthless, but of the precious. ‘Sacrifice’ does not mean the rejection of the evil for the sake of the good, but of the good for the sake of the evil. ‘Sacrifice’ is the surrender of that which you value in favor of that which you don’t.

“If you exchange a penny for a dollar, it is *not* a sacrifice; if you exchange a dollar for a penny, it *is*. If you achieve the career you wanted, after years of struggle, it is *not* a sacrifice; if you then renounce it for the sake of a rival, it *is*. If you own a bottle of milk and gave it to your starving child, it is *not* a sacrifice; if you give it to your neighbor’s child and let your own die, it *is*.

“If you give money to help a friend, it is *not* a sacrifice; if you give it to a worthless stranger, it *is*. If you give your friend a sum you can afford, it is *not* a sacrifice; if you give him money at the cost of

your own discomfort, it is only a partial virtue, according to this sort of moral standard; if you give him money at the cost of disaster to yourself *that* is the virtue of sacrifice in full.

“If you renounce all personal desire and dedicate your life to those you love, you do not achieve full virtue: you still retain a value of your own, which is your love. If you devote your life to random strangers, it is an act of greater virtue. If you devote your life to serving men you hate—*that* is the greatest of the virtues you can practice.

“A sacrifice is the surrender of a value. Full sacrifice is full surrender of all values. If you wish to achieve full virtue, you must seek no gratitude in return for your sacrifice, no praise, no love, no admiration, no self-esteem, not even the pride of being virtuous; the faintest trace of any gain dilutes your virtue. If you pursue a course of action that does not taint your life by any joy, that brings you no value in matter, no value in spirit, no gain, no profit, no reward—if you achieve this state of total zero, you have achieved the ideal of moral perfection.

“You are told that moral perfection is impossible to man—and, by this standard, it is. You cannot achieve it so long as you live, but the value of your life and of your person is gauged by how closely you succeed in approaching that ideal zero which is *death*.

“If you start, however, as a passionless blank, as a vegetable seeking to be eaten, with no values to reject and no wishes to renounce, you will not win the crown of sacrifice. It is not a sacrifice to renounce the unwanted. It is not a sacrifice. It is not a sacrifice to give your life for others, if death is your personal desire. To achieve the virtue of sacrifice, you must want to live, you must love it, you must burn with passion for this earth and for all the splendor it can give you—you must feel the twist of every knife as it slashes your desires away from your reach and drains your love out of your body. It is not mere death that the morality of sacrifice holds out to you as an ideal, but death by slow torture.

“Do not remind me that it pertains only to this life on earth. I am concerned with no other. Neither are you.

“If you wish to save the last of your dignity, do not call your best actions a ‘sacrifice’: that term brands you as immoral. If a mother buys food for her hungry child rather than a hat for herself, it is *not* a sacrifice: she values the child higher than the hat; but it is a sacrifice to the kind of mother whose higher value is the hat, who would prefer her child to starve and feeds him only from a sense of duty. If a man dies fighting for his own freedom, it is *not* a sacrifice: he is not willing to live as a slave; but it *is* a sacrifice to the kind of man who’s willing. If a man refuses to sell his convictions, it is *not* a sacrifice, unless he is the sort of man who has no convictions.

“Sacrifice could be proper only for those who have nothing to sacrifice—no values, no standards, no judgment—those whose desires are irrational whims, blindly conceived and lightly surrendered. For a man of moral stature, whose desires are born of rational values, sacrifice is the surrender of the right to the wrong, of the good to the evil.

“The creed of sacrifice is a morality for the immoral—a morality that declares its own bankruptcy by confessing that it can’t impart to men any personal stake in virtues or value, and that their souls are sewers of depravity, which they must be taught to sacrifice. By his own confession, it is impotent to teach men to be good and can only subject them to constant punishment.

“Are you thinking, in some foggy stupor, that it’s only *material* values that your morality requires you to sacrifice? And *what* do you think are material values? Matter has no value except as a means for the satisfaction of human desires. Matter is only a tool of human values. To what service are you asked to give the material tools your virtue has produced? To the service of that which *you* regard as evil: to a principle you do not share, to a person you do not respect, to the achievement of a purpose opposed to your own—else your gift is *not* a sacrifice.

“Your morality tells you to renounce the material world and to divorce your values from matter. A man whose values are given no expression in material form, whose existence is unrelated to his ideals, whose actions contradict his convictions, is a cheap little hypocrite—yet *that* is the man who obeys your morality and divorces his values from matter. The man who loves one woman, but sleeps with another—the man who admires the talent of a worker, but hires another—the man who considers one cause to be just, but donates his money to the support of another—the man who holds high standards of craftsmanship, but devotes his effort to the production of trash—*these* are the men who have renounced matter, the men who believe that the values of their spirit cannot be brought into material reality.

“Do you say it is the spirit that such men have renounced? Yes, of course. You cannot have one without the other. You are an indivisible entity of matter and consciousness. Renounce your consciousness and you become a brute. Renounce your body and you become a fake. Renounce the material world and you surrender it to evil.

“And *that* is precisely the goal of your morality, the duty that your code demands of you. Give to that which you do not enjoy, serve that which you do not admire, submit to that which you consider evil—surrender the world to the values of others, deny, reject, renounce your *self*. Your self is your *mind*; renounce it and you become a chunk of meat ready for any cannibal to swallow.

“It is your *mind* that they want you to surrender—all those who preach the creed of sacrifice, whatever their tags or their motives, whether they demand it for the sake of your soul or of your body, whether they promise you another life in heaven or a full stomach on this earth. Those who start by saying: ‘It is selfish to pursue your own wishes, you must sacrifice them to the wishes of others’—end up by saying: ‘It is selfish to uphold your convictions, you must sacrifice them to the convictions of others.

“This much is true: the most *selfish* of all things is the independent mind that recognizes no authority higher than its own and no value higher than its judgment of truth. You are asked to sacrifice your intellectual integrity, your logic, your reason, your standard of truth—in favor of becoming a prostitute whose standard is the greatest good for the greatest number.

“If you search your code for guidance, for an answer to the question: ‘What *is* the good?’—the only answer you will find is ‘*The good of others.*’ The good is whatever others wish, whatever you feel they feel they wish, or whatever you feel they ought to feel. ‘The good of others’ is a magic formula that transforms anything into gold, a formula to be recited as a guarantee of moral glory and as a fumigator for any action, even the slaughter of a continent. Your standard of virtue is not an object, not an act, not a principle, but an *intention*. You need no proof, no reasons, no success, you need not achieve *in fact* the good of others—all you need to know is that your motive was the good of others, *not* your own. Your only definition of the good is a negation: the good is the ‘non-good for me.’

“Your code—which boasts that it upholds eternal, absolute, objective moral values and scorns the conditional, the relative and the subjective—your code hands out, as its version of the absolute, the following rule of moral conduct: If *you* wish it, it’s evil; if others wish it, it’s good; if the motive of your action is *your* welfare, don’t do it; if the motive is the welfare of others, then anything goes.

“As this double-jointed, double-standard morality splits you in half, so it splits mankind into two enemy camps: one is *you*, the other is all the rest of humanity. *You* are the only outcast who has no right to wish to live. *You* are the only servant, the rest are the masters, *you* are the only giver, the rest are the takers, *you* are the eternal debtor, the rest are the creditors never to be paid off. You must not question their right to your sacrifice, or the nature of their wishes and their needs: their right is conferred upon them by a negative, by the fact that they are ‘non-you.’

“For those of you who might ask questions, your code provides a consolation prize and booby-trap: it is for your own happiness, it says, that you must serve the happiness of others, the only way to achieve your joy is to give it up to others, the only way to achieve your prosperity is to surrender your wealth to others, the only way to protect your life is to protect all men except yourself—and if you find no joy in this procedure, it is your own fault and the proof of your evil; if you were good, you would find your happiness in providing a banquet for others, and your dignity in existing on such crumbs as *they* might care to toss you.

“You who have no standard of self-esteem, accept the guilt and dare not ask the questions. But you know the unadmitted answer, refusing to acknowledge what you see, what hidden premise moves your world. You know it, not in honest statement, but as a dark uneasiness within you, while you flounder between guilty cheating and grudgingly practicing a principle too vicious to name.

“I, who do not accept the unearned, neither in values nor in *guilt*, am here to ask the questions you evaded. Why is it moral to serve the happiness of others, but not your own? If enjoyment is a value, why is it moral when experienced by others, but immoral when experienced by you? If the sensation of eating a cake is a value, why is it an immoral indulgence in your stomach, but a moral goal for you to achieve in the stomach of others? Why is it immoral for you to desire, but moral for others to do so? Why is it immoral to produce a value and keep it, but moral to give it away? And if it is not moral for you to keep a value, why is it moral for others to accept it? If you are selfless and virtuous when you give it, are they not selfish and vicious when they take it? Does virtue consist of serving vice? Is the moral purpose of those who are good, self-immolation for the sake of those who are evil?

“The answer you evade, the monstrous answer is: No, the takers are not evil, provided they did not *earn* the value you gave them. It is not immoral for them to accept it, provided they are unable to produce it, unable to deserve it, unable to give you any value in return. It is not immoral for them to enjoy it, provided they do not obtain it *by right*.

“Such is the secret core of your creed, the other half of your double standard: it is immoral to live by your own effort, but moral to live by the effort of others—it is immoral to consume your own product, but moral to consume the products of others—it is immoral to earn, but moral to mooch—it is the parasites who are the moral justification for the existence of the producers, but the existence of the parasites is an end in itself—it is evil to profit by achievement, but good to profit by sacrifice—it is evil to create your own happiness, but good to enjoy it at the price of the blood of others.

“Your code divides mankind into two castes and commands them to live by opposite rules: those who may desire anything and those who may desire nothing, the chosen and the demand, the riders and the carriers, the eaters and the eaten. What standard determines your caste? What passkey admits you to the moral elite? The passkey is *lack of value*.

“Whatever the value involved, it is your lack of it that gives you a claim upon those who don’t lack it. It is your *need* that gives you a claim to rewards. If you are able to satisfy your need, your ability annuls your right to satisfy it. But a need you are *unable* to satisfy gives you first right to the lives of mankind.

“If you succeed, any man who fails is your master; if you fail, any man who succeeds is your serf. Whether your failure is just or not, whether your wishes are rational or not, whether your misfortune is undeserved or the result of your vices, it is *misfortune* that gives you a right to rewards. It is *pain*, regardless of its nature or cause, pain as a primary absolute, that gives you a mortgage on all of existence.

“If you heal your pain by your own effort, you receive no moral credit: your code regards it scornfully as an act of self-interest. Whatever value you seek to acquire, be it wealth or food or love or rights, if you acquire it by means of your Virtue, your code does not regard it as a moral acquisition: you occasion no loss to anyone, it is a trade, not alms; a payment, not a sacrifice. The *deserved* belongs in the selfish, commercial realm of mutual profit; it is only the *undeserved* that calls for that moral transaction which consists of profit to one at the price of disaster to the other. To demand rewards for your virtue is selfish and immoral; it is your *lack of virtue* that transforms your demand into a moral right.

“A morality that holds *need* as a claim, holds emptiness—non-existence—as its standard of value; it rewards an *absence*, a defeat: weakness, inability, incompetence, suffering, disease, disaster, the lack, the fault, the flaw—the *zero*.

“Who provides the account to pay these claims? Those who are cursed for being non-zeros, each to the extent of his distance from that ideal. Since all values are the product of virtues, the degree of your virtue is used as the measure of your penalty; the degree of your faults is used as the measure of your gain. Your code declares that the rational man must sacrifice himself to the irrational, the independent man to parasites, the honest man to the dishonest, the man of justice to the unjust, the productive man to thieving loafers, the man of integrity to compromising knaves, the man of self-esteem to sniveling neurotics. Do you wonder at the meanness of soul in those you see around you? The man who achieves these virtues will not accept your moral code; the man who accepts your moral code will not achieve these virtues.

“Under a morality of sacrifice, the first value you sacrifice is morality; the next is self-esteem. When need is the standard, every man is both victim and parasite. As a victim, he must labor to fill the needs of others, leaving himself in the position of a parasite whose needs must be filled by others. He cannot approach his fellow men except in one of two disgraceful roles: he is both a beggar and a sucker.

“You fear the man who has a dollar less than you, that dollar is rightfully his, he makes you feel like a moral defrauder. You hate the man who has a dollar more than you, that dollar is rightfully yours, he makes you feel that you are morally defrauded. The man below is a source of, your guilt, the man

above is a source of your frustration. You do not know what to surrender or demand, when to give and when to grab, what pleasure in life is rightfully yours and what debt is still unpaid to others—you struggle to evade, as ‘theory,’ the knowledge that by the moral standard you’ve accepted you are guilty every moment of your life, there is no mouthful of food you swallow that is not *needed* by someone somewhere on earth—and you give up the problem in blind resentment, you conclude that moral perfection is not to be achieved *or desired*, that you will muddle through by snatching as snatch can and by avoiding the eyes of the young, of those who look at you as if self-esteem were possible and they expected you to have it. Guilt is all that you retain within your soul—and so does every other man, as he goes past, avoiding *your* eyes. Do you wonder why your morality has not achieved brotherhood on earth or the good will of man to man?

“The justification of sacrifice, that your morality propounds, is more corrupt than the corruption it purports to justify. The motive of your sacrifice, it tells you, should be *love*—the love you ought to feel for every man. A morality that professes the belief that the values of the spirit are more precious than matter, a morality that teaches you to scorn a whore who gives her body indiscriminately to all men—this same morality demands that you surrender your soul to promiscuous love for all comers.

“As there can be no causeless wealth, so there can be no causeless love or any sort of causeless emotion. An emotion is a response to a face of reality, an estimate dictated by your standards. To love is to *value*. The man who tells you that it is possible to value without values, to love those whom you appraise as worthless, is the man who tells you that it is possible to grow rich by consuming without producing and that paper money is as valuable as gold.

“Observe that he does not expect you to feel a causeless fear. When his kind get into power, they are expert at contriving means of terror, at giving you ample cause to feel the fear by which they desire to rule you. But when it comes to love, the highest of emotions, you permit them to shriek at you accusingly that you are a moral delinquent if you’re incapable of feeling causeless love. When a man feels fear without reason, you call him to the attention of a psychiatrist; you are not so careful to protect the meaning, the nature and the dignity of love.

“Love is the expression of one’s values, the greatest reward you can earn for the moral qualities you have achieved in your character and person, the emotional price paid by one man for the joy he receives from the virtues of another. Your morality demands that you divorce your love from values and hand it down to any vagrant, not as response to his worth, but as response to his *need*, not as reward, but as alms, not as a payment for virtues, but as a blank check on vices. Your morality tells you that the purpose of love is to set you free of the bonds of morality, that love is superior to moral judgment, that true love transcends, forgives and survives every manner of evil in its object, and the greater the love the greater the depravity it permits to the loved. To love a man for his virtues is paltry and human, it tells you; to love him for his flaws is divine. To love those who are worthy of it is self-interest; to love the unworthy is sacrifice. You owe your love to those who don’t deserve it, and the less they deserve it, the more love you owe them—the more loathsome the object, the nobler your love—the more unfastidious your love, the greater the virtue—and if you can bring your soul to the state of a dump heap that welcomes anything on equal terms, if you can cease to value moral values, you have achieved the state of moral perfection.

“Such is your morality of sacrifice and such are the twin ideals it offers: to refashion the life of your body in the image of a human stockyard, and the life of your spirit in the image of a dump.

“Such was your goal—and you’ve reached it. Why do you now moan complaints about man’s impotence and the futility of human aspirations? Because you were unable to prosper by seeking destruction? Because you were unable to find joy by worshipping pain? Because you were unable to live by holding death as your standard of value?

“The degree of your ability to live was the degree to which you broke your moral code, yet you believe that those who preach it are friends of humanity, you damn yourself and dare not question their motives or their goals. Take a look at them now, when you face your last choice—and if you choose to perish, do so with full knowledge of how cheaply so small an enemy has claimed your life.

“The mystics of both schools, who preach the creed of sacrifice, are germs that attack you through a single sore: your fear of relying on your mind. They tell you that they possess a means of knowledge higher than the mind, a mode of consciousness superior to reason—like a special pull with some bureaucrat of the universe who gives them secret tips withheld from others. The mystics of spirit declare that they possess an extra sense you lack: this special sixth sense consists of contradicting the whole of the knowledge of your five. The mystics of muscle do not bother to assert any claim to extrasensory perception: they merely declare that your senses are not valid, and that their wisdom consists of perceiving your blindness by some manner of unspecified means. Both kinds demand that you invalidate your own consciousness and surrender yourself into their power. They offer you, as proof of their superior knowledge, the fact that they assert the opposite of everything you know, and as proof of their superior ability to deal with existence, the fact that they lead you to misery, self-sacrifice, starvation, destruction.

“They claim that they perceive a mode of being superior to your existence on this earth. The mystics of spirit call it ‘another dimension,’ which consists of denying dimensions. The mystics of muscle call it ‘the future,’ which consists of denying the present. To exist is to possess identity. What identity are they able to give to their superior realm? They keep telling you what it is *not*, but never tell you what it *is*. All their identifications consist of negating: God is that which no human mind can know, they say—and proceed to demand that you consider it knowledge—God is non-man, heaven is non-earth, soul is non-body, virtue ‘is non-profit, A is non-A, perception is non-sensory, knowledge is non-reason. Their definitions are not acts of defining, but of wiping out.

“It is only the metaphysics of a leech that would cling to the idea of a universe where a zero is a standard of identification. A leech would want to seek escape from the necessity to name its own nature—escape from the necessity to know that the substance on which it builds its private universe is blood.

“What is the nature of that superior world to which they sacrifice the world that exists? The mystics of spirit curse matter, the mystics of muscle curse profit the first wish men to profit by renouncing the earth, the second wish men to inherit the earth by renouncing all profit. Their non-material, non-profit worlds are realms where rivers run with milk and coffee, where wine spurts from rocks at their command, where pastry drops on them from clouds at the price of opening their mouth. On this material, profit-chasing earth, an enormous investment of virtue—of intelligence, integrity, energy, skill—is required to construct a railroad to carry them the distance of one mile; in their non-material, non-profit world, they travel from planet to planet at the cost of a wish. If an honest person asks them: ‘How?’—they answer with righteous scorn that a ‘how’ is the concept of vulgar realists; the concept of superior spirits is ‘Somehow.’ On this earth restricted by matter and profit, rewards are achieved by thought; in a world set free of such restrictions, rewards are achieved by wishing.

“And *that* is the whole of their shabby secret. The secret of all their esoteric philosophies, of all their dialectics and super-senses, of their evasive eyes and snarling words, the secret for which they destroy civilization, language, industries and lives, the secret for which they pierce their own eyes and eardrums, grind out their senses, blank out their minds, the purpose for which they dissolve the absolutes of reason, logic, matter, existence, reality—is to erect upon that plastic fog a single holy absolute: their *Wish*.

“The restriction they seek to escape is the law of identity. The freedom they seek is freedom from the fact that an A will remain an A, no matter what their tears or tantrums—that a river will not bring them milk, no matter what their hunger—that water will not run uphill, no matter what comforts they could gain if it did, and if they want to lift it to the roof of a skyscraper, they must do it by a process of thought and labor, in which the nature of an inch of pipe line counts, but their feelings do not—that their feelings are impotent to alter the course of a single speck of dust in space or the nature of any action they have committed.

“Those who tell you that man is unable to perceive a reality undistorted by his senses, mean that they are unwilling to perceive a reality undistorted by their feelings. ‘Things as they are’ are things as perceived by your mind; divorce them from reason and they become ‘things as perceived by your wishes.’

“There is no honest revolt against reason—and when you accept any part of their creed, your motive is to get away with something your reason would not permit you to attempt. The freedom you seek is freedom from the fact that if you stole your wealth, you are a scoundrel, no matter how much you give to charity or how many prayers you recite—that if you sleep with sluts, you’re not a worthy husband, no matter how anxiously you feel that you love our wife next morning—that you are an entity, not a series of random pieces scattered through a universe where nothing sticks and nothing commits you to anything, the universe of a child’s nightmare where identities switch and swim, where the rotter and the hero are interchangeable parts arbitrarily assumed at will—that you are a man—that you are an entity—that you *are*.

“No matter how eagerly you claim that the goal of your mystic wishing is a higher mode of life, the rebellion against identity is the wish for non-existence. The desire not to be anything is the desire not to be.

“Your teachers, the mystics of both schools, have reversed causality in their consciousness, then strive to reverse it in existence. They take their emotions as a cause, and their mind as a passive effect. They make their emotions their tool for perceiving reality. They hold their desires as an irreducible primary, as a fact superseding all facts. An honest man does not desire until he has identified the object of his desire. He says: ‘It is, therefore I want it.’ They say: ‘I want it, therefore it is.’

“They want to cheat the axiom of existence and consciousness, they want their consciousness to be an instrument not of *perceiving* but of *creating* existence, and existence to be not the *object* but the *subject* of their consciousness—they want to be that God they created in their image and likeness, who creates a universe out of a void by means of an arbitrary whim. But reality is not to be cheated. What they achieve is the opposite of their desire. They want an omnipotent power over existence; instead, they lose the power of the consciousness. By refusing to know, they condemn themselves to the horror of a perpetual unknown.

“Those irrational wishes that draw you to their creed, those emotions you worship as an idol, on whose altar you sacrifice the earth, that dark, incoherent passion within you, which you take as the voice of God or of your glands, is nothing more than the corpse of your mind. An emotion that clashes with your reason, an emotion that you cannot explain or control, is only the carcass of that stale thinking which you forbade your mind to revise.

“Whenever you committed the evil of refusing to think and to see, of exempting from the absolute of reality some one small wish of yours, whenever you chose to say: Let me withdraw from the judgment of reason the cookies I stole, or the existence of God, let me have my one irrational whim and I will be a man of reason about all *else—that* was the act of subverting your consciousness, the act of corrupting your mind. Your mind then became a fixed jury who takes orders from a secret underworld, whose verdict distorts the evidence to fit an absolute it dares not touch—and a censored reality is the result, a splintered reality where the bits you chose to see are floating among the chasms of those you didn’t, held together by that embalming fluid of the mind which is an emotion exempted from thought.

“The links you strive to drown are casual connections. The enemy you seek to defeat is the law of causality: it permits you no miracles. The law of causality is the law of identity applied to action. All actions are caused by entities. The nature of an action is caused and determined by the nature of the entities that act; a thing cannot act in contradiction to its nature. An action not caused by an entity would be caused by a zero, which would mean a *zero* controlling a *thing*, a non-entity controlling an entity, the non-existent ruling the existent—which is the universe of your teachers’ desire, the *cause* of their doctrines of causeless action, the *reason* of their revolt against reason, the goal of their morality, their politics, their economics, the ideal they strive for: the reign of the zero.

“The law of identity does not permit you to have your cake and eat it, too. The law of causality does not permit you to eat your cake *before* you have it. But if you drown both laws in the blanks of your mind, if you pretend to yourself and to others that you don’t see—then you can try to proclaim your right to eat your cake today and mine tomorrow, you can preach that the way to have a cake is to eat it first, before you bake it, that the way to produce is to start by consuming, that all wishers have an equal claim to all things, since nothing is caused by anything. The corollary of the *causeless* in matter is the *unearned* in spirit.

“Whenever you rebel against causality, your motive is the fraudulent desire, not to escape it, but worse: to reverse it. You want unearned love, as if love, the effect, could give you personal value, the cause—you want unearned admiration, as if admiration, the effect, could give you virtue, the cause—you want unearned wealth, as if wealth, the effect, could give you ability, the cause—you plead for mercy, *mercy*, not justice, as if an unearned forgiveness could wipe out the *cause* of your plea. And to indulge your ugly little shams, you support the doctrines of your teachers, while they run hog-wild proclaiming that spending, the effect, creates riches, the cause, that machinery, the effect, creates intelligence, the cause, that your sexual desires, the effect, create your philosophical values, the cause.

“Who pays for the orgy? Who causes the causeless? Who are the victims, condemned to remain unacknowledged and to perish in silence, lest their agony disturb your pretense that they do not exist? *We* are, we, the men of the mind.

“We are the *cause* of all the values that you covet, we who perform the process of *thinking*, which is the process of defining *identity* and discovering *causal connections*. We taught you to know, to speak, to produce, to desire, to love. You who abandon reason—were it not for us who preserve it, you would not be able to fulfill or even to conceive your wishes. You would not be able to desire the clothes that had not been made, the automobile that had not been invented, the money that had not been devised, as exchange for goods that did not exist, the admiration that had not been experienced for men who had achieved nothing, the love that belongs and pertains only to those who preserve their capacity to think, to choose, *to value*.

“You—who leap like a savage out of the jungle of your feelings to the Fifth Avenue of *our* New York and proclaim that you want to keep the electric lights, but to destroy the generators—it is *our* wealth that you use while destroying us, it is *our* values that you use while damning us, it is *our* language that you use while denying the mind.

“Just as your mystics of spirit invented their heaven in the image of our earth, omitting our existence, and promised you rewards created by miracle out of non-matter—so your modern mystics of muscle omit our existence and promise you a heaven where matter shapes itself of its own causeless will into all the rewards desired by your non-mind.

“For centuries, the mystics of spirit had existed by running a protection racket—by making life on earth unbearable, then charging you for consolation and relief, by forbidding all the virtues that make existence possible, then riding on the shoulders of your guilt, by declaring production and joy to be sins, then collecting blackmail from the sinners. We, the men of the mind, were the unnamed victims of their creed, we who were willing to break their moral code and to bear damnation for the sin of reason—we who thought and acted, while they wished and prayed—we who were moral outcasts, we who were bootleggers of life when life was held to be a crime—while they basked in moral glory for the virtue of surpassing material greed and of distributing in selfless charity the material goods produced by—blank-out.

“Now we are chained and commanded to produce by savages who do not grant us even the identification of sinners—by savages who proclaim that we do not exist, then threaten to deprive us of the life we don’t possess, if we fail to provide them with the goods we don’t produce. Now we are expected to continue running railroads and to know the minute when a train will arrive after crossing the span of a continent, we are expected to continue running steel mills and to know the molecular structure of every drop of metal in the cables of your bridges and in the body of the airplanes that support you in mid-air—while the tribes of your grotesque little mystics of muscle fight over the carcass of our world, gibbering in sounds of non-language that there are no principles, no absolutes, no knowledge, no mind.

“Dropping below the level of a savage, who believes that the magic words he utters have the power to alter reality, they believe that reality can be altered by the power of the words they do *not* utter—and their magic tool is the blank-out, the pretense that nothing can come into existence past the voodoo of their refusal to identify it.

“As they feed on stolen wealth in body, so they feed on stolen concepts in mind, and proclaim that honesty consists of refusing to know that one is stealing. As they use effects while denying causes, so they use our concepts while denying the roots and the existence of the concepts they are using.

As they seek, not to build, but to *take over* industrial plants, so they seek, not to think, but to *take over* human thinking.

“As they proclaim that the only requirement for running a factory is the ability to turn the cranks of the machines, and blank out the question of who created the factory—so they proclaim that there are no entities, that nothing exists but motion, and blank out the fact that *motion* presupposes the thing which moves, that without the concept of entity, there can be no such concept as ‘motion.’ As they proclaim their right to consume the unearned, and blank out the question of who’s to produce it—so they proclaim that there is no law of identity, that nothing exists but change, and blank out the fact that *change* presupposes the concepts of what changes, from what and to what, that, without the law of identity no such concept as ‘change’ is possible. As they rob an industrialist while denying his value, so they seek to seize power over all of existence while denying that existence exists.

“‘We know that we know nothing,’ they chatter, blanking out the fact that they are claiming knowledge—‘There are not absolutes,’ they chatter, blanking out the fact that they are uttering an absolute—‘You cannot *prove* that you exist or that you’re conscious,’ they chatter, blanking out the fact that *proof* presupposes existence, consciousness and a complex chain of knowledge: the existence of something to know, of a consciousness able to know it, and of a knowledge that has learned to distinguish between such concepts as the proved and the unproved.

“When a savage who has not learned to speak declares that existence must be proved, he is asking you to prove it by means of non-existence—when he declares that your consciousness must be proved, he is asking you to prove it by means of unconsciousness—he is asking you to step into a void outside of existence and consciousness to give him proof of both—he is asking you to become a zero gaining knowledge about a zero.

“When he declares that an axiom is a matter of arbitrary choice and he doesn’t choose to accept the axiom that he exists, he blanks out the fact that he has accepted it by uttering that sentence, that the only way to reject it is to shut one’s mouth, expound no theories and die.

“An axiom is a statement that identifies the base of knowledge and of any further statement pertaining to that knowledge, a statement necessarily contained in all others, whether any particular speaker chooses to identify it or not. An axiom is a proposition that defeats its opponents by the fact that they have to accept it and use it in the process of any attempt to deny it. Let the caveman who does not choose to accept the axiom of identity, try to present his theory without using the concept of identity or any concept derived from it—let the anthropoid who does not choose to accept the existence of nouns, try to devise a language without nouns, adjectives or verbs—let the witch-doctor who does not choose to accept the validity of sensory perception, try to prove it without using the data he obtained by sensory perception—let the head-hunter who does not choose to accept the validity of logic, try to prove it without using logic—let the pigmy who proclaims that a skyscraper needs no foundation after it reaches its fiftieth story, yank the base from under *his* building, not yours—let the cannibal who snarls that the freedom of man’s mind was needed to *create* an industrial civilization, but is not needed to *maintain* it, be given an arrowhead and bearskin, not a university chair of economics.

“Do you think they are taking you back to dark ages? They are taking you back to darker ages than any your history has known. Their goal is not the era of pre-science, but the era of pre-language. Their purpose is to deprive you of the concept on which man’s mind, his life and his culture depend:

the concept of an *objective* reality. Identify the development of a human consciousness—and you will know the purpose of their creed.

“A savage is a being who has not grasped that A is A and that reality is real. He has arrested his mind at the level of a baby’s, at the state when a consciousness acquires its initial sensory perception and has not learned to distinguish solid objects. It is to a baby that the world appears as a blur of motion, without things that move—and the birth of his mind is the day when he grasps that the streak that keeps flickering past him is his mother and the whirl beyond her is a curtain, that the two are solid entities and neither can turn into the other, that they *are* what they are, that they *exist*. The day when he grasps that matter has no volition is the day when he grasps that *he* has—and this is his birth as a *human* being. The day when he grasps that the reflection he sees in a mirror is not a delusion, that it is real, but it is not himself, that the mirage he sees in a desert is not a delusion, that the air and the light rays that cause it are real, but it is not a city, it is a city’s reflection—the day when he grasps that he is not a passive recipient of the sensations of any given moment, that his senses do not provide him with automatic knowledge in separate snatches independent of context, but only with the material of knowledge, which his mind must learn to integrate—the day when he grasps that his senses cannot deceive him, that physical objects cannot act without causes, that his organs of perception are physical and have no volition, no power to invent or to distort, that the evidence they give him is an absolute, but his mind must learn to understand it, his mind must discover the nature, the causes, the full context of his sensory material, his mind must identify the things that he perceives—that is the day of his birth as a thinker and scientist.

“We are the men who reach that day; you are the men who choose to reach it partly; a savage is a man who never does.

“To a savage, the world is a place of unintelligible miracles where anything is possible to inanimate matter and nothing is possible to *him*. His world is not the unknown, but that irrational horror: the unknowable. He believes that physical objects are endowed with a mysterious volition, moved by *causeless*, unpredictable whims, while *he* is a helpless pawn at the mercy of forces beyond his control. He believes that nature is ruled by demons who possess an omnipotent power and that reality is their fluid plaything, where they can turn his bowl of meal into a snake and his wife into a beetle at any moment, where the A he has never discovered can be any non-A they choose, where the only knowledge he possesses is that he must not attempt to know. He can count on nothing, he can only *wish*, *and* he spends his life on wishing, on begging his demons to grant him his wishes by the arbitrary power of their will, giving them credit when they do, taking the blame when they don’t, offering them sacrifices in token of his gratitude and sacrifices in token of his guilt, crawling on his belly in fear and worship of sun and moon and wind and rain and of any thug who announces himself as their spokesman, provided his words are unintelligible and his mask sufficiently frightening—he wishes, begs and crawls, and dies, leaving you, as a record of his view of existence, the distorted monstrosities of his idols, part-man, part-animal, part-spider, the embodiments of the world of non-A.

“*His* is the intellectual state of your modern teachers and *his* is the world to which they want to bring you.

“If you wonder by what means they propose to do it, walk into any college classroom and you will hear your professors teaching your children that man can be certain of nothing, that his consciousness has no validity whatever, that he can learn no facts and no laws of existence, that he’s incapable of knowing an objective reality. What, then, is his standard of knowledge and truth?

Whatever others *believe*, is their answer. There is no knowledge, they teach, there's only *faith*: your belief that you exist is an act of faith, no more valid than another's faith in his right to kill you; the axioms of science are an act of faith, no more valid than a mystic's faith in revelations; the belief that electric light can be produced by 'a generator is an act of faith, no more valid than the belief that it can be produced by a rabbit's foot kissed under a stepladder on the first of the moon—truth is whatever people want it to be, and *people* are everyone except yourself; reality is whatever people choose to say it is, there are no objective facts, there are only people's arbitrary wishes—a man who seeks knowledge in a laboratory by means of test tubes and logic is an old-fashioned, superstitious fool; a true scientist is a man who goes around taking public polls—and if it weren't for the selfish greed of the manufacturers of steel girders, who have a vested interest in obstructing the progress of science, you would learn that New York City does not exist, because a poll of the entire population of the world would tell you by a landslide majority that their *beliefs* forbid its existence.

"For centuries, the mystics of spirit have proclaimed that faith is superior to reason, but have not dared deny the existence of reason. Their heirs and products, the mystics of muscle, have completed their job and achieved their dream: they proclaim that everything is faith, and call it a revolt against believing. As revolt against unproved assertions, they proclaim that nothing can be proved; as revolt against supernatural knowledge, they proclaim that no knowledge is possible; as-revolt against the enemies of science, they proclaim that science is superstition; as revolt against the enslavement of the mind, they proclaim that there is no mind.

"If you surrender your power to perceive, if you accept the switch of your standard from the *objective* to the *collective* and wait for mankind to tell you what to think, you will find another switch taking place before the eyes you have renounced: you will find that your teachers become the rulers of the collective, and if you then refuse to obey them, protesting that they are not the whole of mankind, they will answer: 'By what means do you know that we are not? *Are*, brother? Where did you get that old-fashioned term?'

"If you doubt that such is their purpose, observe with what passionate consistency the mystics of muscle are striving to make you forget that a concept such as '*Mind*' has ever existed. Observe the twists of undefined verbiage, the words with rubber meanings, the terms left floating in midstream, by means of which they try to get around the recognition of the concept of '*thinking*.' Your consciousness, they tell you, consists of 'reflexes,' 'reactions,' 'experiences,' 'urges,' and 'drives'—and refuse to identify the means by which they acquired that knowledge, to identify the act they are performing when they tell it or the act you are performing when you listen. Words have the power to 'consider' you, they say and refuse to identify the reason why words have the power to change you—blank-out. A student reading a book understands it through a process of—blank-out. A scientist working on an invention is engaged in the activity of—blank-out. A psychologist helping a neurotic to solve a problem and untangle a conflict, does it by means of—blank-out. 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; the only problem left for your 'reflexes' to solve is now the problem of distribution. Who solved the problem of production? Humanity, they answer. What was the solution? The goods are here. How did they get here? Somehow. What caused it? Nothing has causes.

“They proclaim that every man born is entitled to exist without labor and, the laws of reality to the contrary notwithstanding, is entitled to receive his ‘minimum sustenance’—his food, his clothes, his shelter—with no effort on his part, as his due and his birthright. To receive it—from whom? Blank-out. Every man, they announce, owns an equal share of the technological benefits created in the world. Created—by whom? Blank-out. Frantic cowards who posture as defenders of industrialists now define the purpose of economics as ‘an adjustment between the unlimited *desires* of men and the goods supplied in limited quantity.’ Supplied—by whom? Blank-out. Intellectual hoodlums who pose as professors, shrug away the thinkers of the past by declaring that their social theories were based on the impractical assumption that man was a rational being—but since men are not rational, they declare, there ought to be established a system that will make it possible for them to exist while being *irrational*, which means: while defying reality. Who will make it possible? Blank-out. Any stray mediocrity rushes into print with plans to control the production of mankind—and whoever agrees or disagrees with his statistics, no one questions his right to enforce his plans by means of a gun. Enforce—on whom? Blank-out. Random females with causeless incomes titter on trips around the globe and return to deliver the message that the backward peoples of the world *demand* a higher standard of living. Demand—of whom? Blank-out.

“And to forestall any inquiry into the cause of the difference between a jungle village and New York City, they resort to the ultimate obscenity of explaining man’s industrial progress—skyscrapers, cable bridges, power motors, railroad trains—by declaring that man is an animal who possesses an *‘instinct of tool-making.’*

“Did you wonder what is wrong with the world? You are now seeing the climax of the creed of the uncaused and unearned. All your gangs of mystics, of spirit or muscle, are fighting one another for power to rule you, snarling that love is the solution for all the problems of your spirit and that a whip is the solution for all the problems of your body—you who have agreed to have no mind. Granting man less dignity than they grant to cattle, ignoring what an animal trainer could tell them—that no animal can be trained by fear, that a tortured elephant will trample its torturer, but will not work for him or carry his burdens—they expect man to continue to produce electronic tubes, supersonic airplanes, atom-smashing engines and interstellar telescopes, with his ration of meat for reward and a lash on his back for incentive.

“Make no mistake about the character of mystics. To undercut your consciousness has always been their only purpose throughout the ages—and *power*, the power to rule you by force, has always been their only lust.

“From the rites of the jungle witch-doctors, which distorted reality into grotesque absurdities, stunted the minds of their victims and kept them in terror of the supernatural for stagnant stretches of centuries—to the supernatural doctrines of the Middle Ages, which kept men huddling on the mud floors of their-hovels, in terror that the devil might steal the soup they had worked eighteen hours to earn—to the seedy little smiling professor who assures you that your brain has no capacity to think, that you have no means of perception and must blindly obey the omnipotent will of that supernatural force: Society—all of it is the same performance for the same and only purpose: to reduce you to the kind of pulp that has surrendered the validity of its consciousness.

“But it cannot be done to you without your consent. If you permit it to be done, you deserve it.

“When you listen to a mystic’s harangue on the impotence of the human mind and begin to doubt *your* consciousness, not his, when you permit your precariously semi-rational state to be shaken by any assertion and decide it is safer to trust his superior certainty and knowledge, the joke is on both of you: your sanction is the only source of certainty he has. The supernatural power that a mystic dreads, the unknowable spirit he worships, the consciousness he considers omnipotent is—*yours*.

“A mystic is a man who surrendered his mind at its first encounter with the minds of others. Somewhere in the distant reaches of his childhood, when his own understanding of reality clashed with the assertions of others, with their arbitrary orders and contradictory demands, he gave in to so craven a fear of independence that he renounced his rational faculty. At the crossroads of the choice between ‘I know’ and ‘They say,’ he chose the authority of others, he chose to submit rather than to understand, to *believe* rather than to think. Faith in the supernatural begins as faith in the superiority of others. His surrender took the form of the feeling that he must hide his lack of understanding, that others possess some mysterious knowledge of which he alone is deprived, that reality is whatever they want it to be, through some means forever denied to him.

“From then on, afraid to think, he is left at the mercy of unidentified feelings. His feelings become his only guide, his only remnant of personal identity, he clings to them with ferocious possessiveness—and whatever thinking he does is devoted to the struggle of hiding from himself that the nature of his feelings is terror.

“When a mystic declares that he *feels* the existence of a power superior to reason, he feels it all right, but that power is not an omniscient super-spirit of the universe, it is the consciousness of any passer-by to whom he has surrendered his own. A mystic is driven by the urge to impress, to cheat, to flatter, to deceive, to *force* that omnipotent consciousness of others. ‘*They*’ are his only key to reality, he feels that he cannot exist save by harnessing their mysterious power and extorting their unaccountable consent. ‘*They*’ are his only means of perception and, like a blind man who depends on the sight of a dog, he feels he must leash them in order to live. To control the consciousness of others becomes his only passion; power-lust is a weed that grows only in the vacant lots of an abandoned mind.

“Every dictator is a mystic, and every mystic is a potential dictator. A mystic craves obedience from men, not their agreement. He wants them to surrender their consciousness to his assertions, his edicts, his wishes, his whims—as *his* consciousness is surrendered to theirs. He wants to deal with men by means of faith and force—he finds no satisfaction in their consent if he must earn it by means of facts and reason. Reason is the enemy he dreads and, simultaneously, considers precarious: reason, to him, is a means of deception, he *feels* that men possess some power more potent than reason—and only their causeless belief or their forced obedience can give him a sense of security, a proof that he has gained control of the mystic endowment he lacked. His lust is to command, not to convince: conviction requires an act of independence and press on the absolute of an objective reality. What he seeks is power over reality and over men’s means of perceiving it, their mind, the power to interpose his will between existence and consciousness, as if, by agreeing to fake the reality he orders them to fake, men would, in fact, create it.

“Just as the mystic is a parasite in matter, who expropriates the wealth created by others—just as he is a parasite in spirit, who plunders the ideas created by others—so he falls below the level of a

lunatic who creates his own distortion of reality, to the level of a parasite of lunacy who seeks a distortion created by others.

“There is only one state that fulfills the mystic’s longing for infinity, non-causality, non-identity: *death*. No matter what unintelligible causes he ascribes to his incommunicable feelings, whoever rejects reality rejects existence—and the feelings that move him from then on are hatred for all the values of man’s life, and lust for all the evils that destroy it. A mystic relishes the spectacle of suffering, of poverty, subservience and terror; these give him a feeling of triumph, a proof of the defeat of rational reality. But no other reality exists.

“No matter whose welfare he professes to serve, be it the welfare of God or of that disembodied gargoyle he describes as ‘The People,’ no matter what ideal he proclaims in terms of some supernatural dimension—in *fact, in reality, on earth*, his ideal is *death*, his craving is to kill, his only satisfaction is to torture.

“Destruction is the only end that the mystics’ creed has ever achieved, as it is the only end that, you see them achieving today, and if the ravages wrought by their acts have not made them question their doctrines, if they profess to be moved by love, yet are not deterred by piles of human corpses, it is because the truth about their souls is worse than the obscene excuse you have allowed them, the excuse that the end justifies the means and that the horrors they practice are means to nobler ends. The truth is that those horrors are their ends.

“You who’re depraved enough to believe that you could adjust yourself to a mystic’s dictatorship and could please him by obeying his orders—there is no way to please him; when you obey, he will reverse his orders; he seeks obedience for the sake of obedience and destruction for the sake of destruction. You who are craven enough to believe that you can make terms with a mystic by giving in to his extortions—there is no way to buy him off, the bribe he wants is your life, as slowly or as fast as you are willing to give it in—and the monster he seeks to bribe is the hidden blank-out in his mind, which drives him to kill in order not to learn that the death he desires is his own.

“You who are innocent enough to believe that the forces let loose in your world today are moved by greed for material plunder—the mystics’ scramble for spoils is only a screen to conceal from their mind the nature of their motive. Wealth is a means of human life, and they clamor for wealth in imitation of living beings, to pretend to themselves that they desire to live, but their swinish indulgence in plundered luxury is not enjoyment, it is escape. They do not want to own your fortune, they want you to lose it; they do not want to succeed, they want you to fail; they do not want to live, they want you to die; they desire nothing, they hate existence, and they keep running, each trying not to learn that the object of his hatred is himself.

“You who’ve never grasped the nature of evil, you who describe them as ‘misguided idealists’—may the God you invented forgive you!—*they* are the essence of evil, they, those anti-living objects who seek, by devouring the world, to fill the *selfless* zero of their soul. It is not your wealth that they’re after. Theirs is a conspiracy against the mind, which means: against life and man.

“It is a conspiracy without leader or direction, and the random little thugs of the moment who cash in on the agony of one land or another are chance scum riding the torrent from the broken dam of the sewer of centuries, from the reservoir of hatred for reason, for logic, for ability, for achievement, for

joy, stored by every whining anti-human who ever preached the superiority of the 'heart' over the mind.

"It is a conspiracy of all those who seek, not to live, but to *get away with living*, those who seek to cut just one small corner of reality and are drawn, by feeling, to all the others who are busy cutting other corners—a conspiracy that unites by links of evasion all those who pursue a zero as a value: the professor who, unable to think, takes pleasure in crippling the mind of his students, the businessman who, to protect his stagnation, takes pleasure in chaining the ability of competitors, the neurotic who, to defend his self-loathing, takes pleasure in breaking men of self-esteem, the incompetent who takes pleasure in defeating achievement, the mediocrity who takes pleasure in demolishing greatness, the eunuch who takes pleasure in the castration of all pleasure—and all their intellectual munition-makers, all those who preach that the immolation of virtue will transform vices into virtue. *Death* is the premise at the root of their theories, *death* is the goal of their actions in practice—and *you* are the last of their victims.

"We, who are the living buffers between you and the nature of your creed, are no longer there to save you from the effects of your chosen beliefs. We are no longer willing to pay with our lives the debts you incurred in yours or the moral deficit piled up by all the generations behind you. You had been living on borrowed time—and I am the man who has called in the loan.

"I am the man whose existence your blank-outs were intended to permit you to ignore. I am the man whom you did not want either to live or to die. You did not want me to live, because you were afraid of knowing that I carried the responsibility you dropped and that your lives depended upon me; you did not want me to die, because you knew it.

"Twelve years ago, when I worked in your world, I was an inventor. I was one of a profession that came last in human history and will be first to vanish on the way back to the sub-human. An inventor is a man who asks 'Why?' of the universe and lets nothing stand between the answer and his mind.

"Like the man who discovered the use of steam or the man who discovered the use oil, I discovered a source of energy which was available since the birth of the globe, but which men had not known how to use except as an object of worship, of terror and of legends without a thundering god. I completed the experimental model of a motor that would have made a fortune for me and for those who had hired me, a motor that would have raised the efficiency of every human installation using power and would have added the gift of higher productivity to every hour you spend at earning your living.

"Then, one night at a factory meeting, I heard myself sentenced to death by reason of my achievement. I heard three parasites assert that my brain and my life were their property, that my right to exist was conditional and depended on the satisfaction of their desires. The purpose of my ability, they said, was to serve the needs of those who were less able. I had no right to live, they said, by reason of my competence for living: their right to live was unconditional, by reason of their incompetence.

"Then I saw what was wrong with the world, I saw what destroyed men and nations, and where the battle for life had to be fought. I saw that the enemy was an inverted morality—and that my sanction was its only power. I saw that evil was impotent—that evil was the irrational, the blind, the anti-real—and that the only weapon of its triumph was the willingness of the good to serve it. Just as

the parasites around me were proclaiming their helpless dependence on my mind and were expecting me voluntarily to accept a slavery they had no power to enforce, just as they were counting on my self-immolation to provide them with the means of their plan—so throughout the world and throughout men's history, in every version and form, from the extortions of loafing relatives to the atrocities of collective countries, it is the good, the able, the men of reason, who act as their own destroyers, who transfuse to evil the blood of their virtue and let evil transmit to them the poison of destruction, thus gaining for evil the power of survival, and for their own values—the impotence of death. I saw that there comes a point, in the defeat of any man of virtue, when his own consent is needed for evil to win—and that no manner of injury done to him by others can succeed if he chooses to withhold his consent. I saw that I could put an end to your outrages by pronouncing a single word in my mind. I pronounced it. The word was 'No.'

"I quit that factory. I quit your world, I made it my job to warn your victims and to give them the method and the weapon to fight you. The method was to refuse to deflect retribution. The weapon was justice.

"If you want to know what you lost when I quit and when my strikers deserted your world—stand on an empty stretch of soil in a wilderness unexplored by men and ask yourself what manner of survival you would achieve and how long you would last if you refused to think, with no one around to teach you the motions, or, if you chose to think, how much your mind would be able to discover—ask yourself how many independent conclusions you have reached in the course of your life and how much of your time was spent on performing the actions you learned from others—ask yourself whether you would be able to discover how to till the soil and grow your food, whether you would be able to invent a wheel, a lever, an induction coil, a generator, an electronic tube—then decide whether men of ability are exploiters who live by the fruit of *your* labor and rob you of the wealth that *you* produce, and whether you dare to believe that you possess the power to enslave them. Let your women take a look at a jungle female with her shriveled face and pendulous breasts, as she sits grinding meal in a bowl, hour after hour, century by century—then let them ask themselves whether their 'instinct of tool-making' will provide them with their electric refrigerators, their washing machines and vacuum cleaners, and, if not, whether they care to destroy those who provided it all, but not 'by instinct.'

"Take a look around you, you savages who stutter that ideas are created by men's means of production, that a machine is not the product of human thought, but a mystical power that produces human thinking. You have never discovered the industrial age—and you cling to the morality of the barbarian eras when a miserable form of human subsistence was produced by the muscular labor of slaves. Every mystic had always longed for slaves, to protect him from the material reality he dreaded. But *you*, you grotesque little atavists, stare blindly at the skyscrapers and smokestacks around you and dream of enslaving the material providers who are scientists, inventors, industrialists. When you clamor for public ownership of the means of production, you are clamoring for public ownership of the mind. I have taught my strikers that the answer you deserve is only: 'Try and get it.'

"You proclaim yourself unable to harness the forces of inanimate matter, yet propose to harness the minds of men who are able to achieve the feats you cannot equal. You proclaim that you cannot survive without us, yet propose to dictate the terms of our survival. You proclaim that you need us, yet indulge the impertinence of asserting your right to rule us by force—and expect that we, who

are not afraid of that physical nature which fills you with terror, will cower at the sight of any lout who has talked you into voting him a chance to command us.

“You propose to establish a social order based on the following tenets: that you’re incompetent to run your own life, but competent to run the lives of others—that you’re unfit to exist in freedom, but fit to become an omnipotent ruler—that you’re unable to earn your living by the use of your own intelligence, but able to judge politicians and to vote them into jobs of total power over arts you have never seen, over sciences you have never studied, over achievements of which you have no knowledge, over the gigantic industries where you, by your own definition of your capacity, would be unable successfully to fill the job of assistant greaser.

“This idol of your cult of zero-worship, this symbol of impotence—the congenital dependent—is your image of man and your standard of value, in whose likeness you strive to refashion your soul. ‘It’s only human,’ you cry in defense of any depravity, reaching the stage of self-abasement where you seek to make the concept ‘*human*’ mean the weakling, the fool, the rotter, the liar, the failure, the coward, the fraud, and to exile from the human race the hero, the thinker, the producer, the inventor, the strong, the purposeful, the pure—as if ‘to feel’ were human, but to think were not, as if to fail were human, but to succeed were not, as if corruption were human, but virtue were not—as if the premise of *death* were proper to man, but the premise of *life* were not.

“In order to deprive us of honor, that you may then deprive us of our wealth, you have always regarded us as slaves who deserve no moral recognition. You praise any venture that claims to be non-profit, and damn the men who made the profits that make the venture possible. You regard as ‘in the public interest’ any project serving those who do not pay; it is not in the public interest to provide any services for those who do the paying. ‘Public benefit’ is anything given as alms; to engage in trade is to injure the public. ‘Public welfare’ is the welfare of those who do not earn it; those who do, are entitled to no welfare. ‘*The public*,’ to you, is whoever has failed to achieve any virtue or value; whoever achieves it, whoever provides the goods you require for survival, ceases to be regarded as part of the public or as part of the human race.

“What blank-out permitted you to hope that you could get away with this muck of contradictions and to plan it as an ideal society, when the ‘No’ of your victims was sufficient to demolish the whole of your structure? What permits any insolent beggar to wave his sores in the face of his betters and to plead for help in the tone of a threat? You cry, as he does, that you are counting on our pity, but your secret hope is the moral code that has taught you to count on our *guilt*. You expect us to feel guilty of our virtues in the presence of your vices, wounds and failures—guilty of succeeding at existence, guilty of enjoying the life that you damn, yet beg us to help you to live.

“Did you want to know who is John Galt? I am the first man of ability who refused to regard it as guilt. I am the first man who would not do penance for my virtues or let them be used as the tools of my destruction. I am the first man who would not suffer martyrdom at the hands of those who wished me to perish for the privilege of keeping them alive. I am the first man who told them that I did not need them, and until they learned to deal with me as traders, giving value for value, they would have to exist without me, as I would exist without them; then I would let them learn whose is the need and whose the ability—and if human survival is the standard, whose terms would set the way to survive.

“I have done by plan and intention what has been done throughout history by silent default. There have always been men of intelligence who went on strike, in protest and despair, but they did not

know the meaning of their action. The man who retires from public life, to think, but not to share his thoughts—the man who chooses to spend his years in the obscurity of menial employment, keeping to himself the fire of his mind, never giving it form, expression or reality, refusing to bring it into a world he despises—the man who is defeated by revulsion, the man who renounces before he has started, the man who gives up rather than give in, the man who functions at a fraction of his capacity, disarmed by his longing for an ideal he has not found—they are on strike, on strike against unreason, on strike against your world and your values. But not knowing any values of their own, they abandon the quest to know—in the darkness of their hopeless indignation, which is righteous without knowledge of the fight, and passionate without knowledge of desire, they concede to you the power of reality and surrender the incentives of their mind—and they perish in bitter futility, as rebels who never learned the object of their rebellion, as lovers who never discovered their love.

“The infamous times you call the Dark Ages were an era of intelligence on strike, when men of ability went underground and lived undiscovered, studying in secret, and died; destroying the works of their mind, when only a few of the bravest of martyrs remained to keep the human race alive. Every period ruled by mystics was an era of stagnation and want, when most men were on strike against existence, working for less than their barest survival, leaving nothing but scraps for their rulers to loot, refusing to think, to venture, to produce, when the ultimate collector of their profits and the final authority on truth or error was the whim of some gilded degenerate sanctioned as superior to reason by divine right and by grace of a club. The road of human history was a string of blank-outs over sterile stretches eroded by faith and force, with only a few brief bursts of sunlight, when the released energy of the men of the mind performed the wonders you gaped at, admired and promptly extinguished again.

“But there will be no extinction, this time. The game of the mystics is up. You will perish in and by your own unreality. We, the men of reason, will survive.

“I have called out on strike the kind of martyrs who had never deserted you before. I have given them the weapon they had lacked: the knowledge of their own moral value. I have taught them that the world is ours, whenever we choose to claim it, by virtue and grace of the fact that ours is the Morality of Life. They, the great victims who had produced all the wonders of humanity’s brief summer, they, the industrialists, the conquerors of matter, had not discovered the nature of their right. They had known that theirs was the power. I taught them that theirs was the glory.

“You, who dare to regard us as the moral inferiors of any mystic who claims supernatural visions—you, who scramble like vultures for plundered pennies, yet honor a fortune-teller above a fortune-maker—you, who scorn a businessman as ignoble, but esteem any posturing artist as exalted—the root of your standards is that mystic miasma which comes from primordial swamps, that cult of death, which pronounces a businessman immoral by reason of the fact that he keeps you alive. You, who claim that you long to rise above the crude concerns of the body, above the drudgery of serving mere physical needs—who is enslaved by physical needs: the Hindu who labors from sunrise to sunset at the shafts of a hand-plow for a bowl of rice, or the American who is driving a tractor? *Who* is the conqueror of physical reality: the man who sleeps on a bed of nails or the man who sleeps on an inner-spring mattress? *Which* is the monument to the triumph of the human spirit over matter: the germ-eaten hovels on the shorelines of the Ganges or the Atlantic skyline of New York?

“Unless you learn the answers to these questions—and learn to stand at reverent attention when you face the achievements of man’s mind—you will not stay much longer on this earth, which we love and will not permit you to damn. You will not sneak by with the rest of your lifespan. I have foreshortened the usual course of history and have let you discover the nature of the payment you had hoped to switch to the shoulders of others. It is the last of your own living power that will now be drained to provide the unearned for the worshippers and carriers of Death. Do not pretend that a malevolent reality defeated you—you were defeated by your own evasions. Do not pretend that you will perish for a noble ideal—you will perish as fodder for the haters of man.

“But to those of you who still retain a remnant of the dignity and will to love one’s life, I am offering the chance to make a choice. Choose whether you wish to perish for a morality you have never believed or practiced. Pause on the brink of self-destruction and examine your values and your life. You had known how to take an inventory of your wealth. Now take an inventory of your mind.

“Since childhood, you have been hiding the guilty secret that you feel no desire to be moral, no desire to seek self-immolation, that you dread and hate your code, but dare not say it even to yourself, that you’re devoid of those moral ‘instincts’ which others profess to feel. The less you felt, the louder you proclaimed your selfless love and servitude to others, in dread of ever letting them discover your own self, the self that you betrayed, the self that you kept in concealment, like a skeleton in the closet of your body. And they, who were at once your dupes and your deceivers, they listened and voiced their loud approval, in dread of ever letting you discover that they were harboring the same unspoken secret. Existence among you is a giant pretense, an act you all perform for one another, each feeling that he is the only guilty freak, each placing his moral authority in the unknowable known only to others, each faking the reality he feels they expect him to fake, some having the courage to break the vicious circle.

“No matter what dishonorable compromise you’ve made with your impracticable creed, no matter what miserable balance, half-cynicism, half-superstition, you now manage to maintain, you still preserve the root, the lethal tenet: the belief that the moral and the practical are opposites. Since childhood, you have been running from the terror of a choice you have never dared fully to identify: If the *practical*, whatever you must practice to exist, whatever works, succeeds, achieves your purpose, whatever brings you food and joy, whatever profits you, is evil—and if the good, the moral, is the *impractical*, whatever fails, destroys, frustrates, whatever injures you and brings you loss or pain—then your choice is to be moral or to live.

“The sole result of that murderous doctrine was to remove morality from life. You grew up to believe that moral laws bear no relation to the job of living, except as an impediment and threat, that man’s existence is an amoral jungle where anything goes and anything works. And in that fog of switching definitions which descends upon a frozen mind, you have forgotten that the evils damned by your creed were the virtues required for living, and you have come to believe that actual evils are the *practical* means of existence. Forgetting that the impractical ‘good’ was self-sacrifice, you believe that self-esteem is impractical; forgetting that the practical ‘evil’ was production, you believe that robbery is practical.

“Swinging like a helpless branch in the wind of an uncharted moral wilderness, you dare not fully to be evil or fully to live. When you are honest, you feel the resentment of a sucker; when you cheat, you feel terror and shame, your pain is augmented by the feeling that pain is your natural state. You pity the men you admire, you believe they are doomed to fail; you envy the men you hate, you believe

they are the masters of existence. You feel disarmed when you come up against a scoundrel: you believe that evil is bound to win, since the moral is the impotent, the *impractical*.

“Morality, to you, is a phantom scarecrow made of duty, of boredom, of punishment, of pain, a cross-breed between the first schoolteacher of your past and the tax collector of your present, a scarecrow standing in a barren field, waving a stick to chase away your pleasures—and *pleasure*, to you, is a liquor-soggy brain, a mindless slut, the stupor of a moron who stakes his cash on some animal’s race, since pleasure cannot be moral.

“If you identify your actual belief, you will find a triple damnation—of yourself, of life, of virtue—in the grotesque conclusion you have reached: you believe that morality is a necessary evil.

“Do you wonder why you live without dignity, love without fire and die without resistance? Do you wonder why, wherever you look, you see nothing but unanswerable questions, why your life is torn by impossible conflicts, why you spend it straddling irrational fences to evade artificial choices, such as soul or body, mind or heart, security or freedom, private profit or public good?

“Do you cry that you find no answers? By what means did you hope to find them? You reject your tool of perception—your mind—then complain that the universe is a mystery. You discard your key, then wail that all doors are locked against you. You start out in pursuit of the irrational, then damn existence for making no sense.

“The fence you have been straddling for two hours—while hearing my words and seeking to escape them—is the coward’s formula contained in the sentence: ‘But we don’t have to go to extremes!’ The extreme you have always struggled to avoid is the recognition that reality is final, that A is A and that the truth is true. A moral code impossible to practice, a code that demands imperfection or death, has taught you to dissolve all ideas in fog, to permit no firm definitions, to regard any concept as approximate and any rule of conduct as elastic, to hedge on any principle, to compromise on any value, to take the middle of any road. By extorting your acceptance of supernatural absolutes, it has forced you to reject the absolute of nature. By making moral judgments impossible, it has made you incapable of rational judgment. A code that forbids you to cast the first stone, has forbidden you to admit the identity of stones and to know when or if you’re being stoned.

“The man who refuses to judge, who neither agrees nor disagrees, who declares that there are no absolutes and believes that he escapes responsibility, is the man responsible for all the blood that is now spilled in the world. Reality is an absolute, existence is an absolute, a speck of dust is an absolute and so is a human life. Whether you live or die is an absolute. Whether you have a piece of bread or not, is an absolute. Whether you eat your bread or see it vanish into a looter’s stomach, is an absolute.

“There are two sides to every issue: one side is right and the other is wrong, but the middle is always evil. The man who is wrong still retains some respect for truth, if only by accepting the responsibility of choice. But the man in the middle is the knave who blanks out the truth in order to pretend that no choice or values exist, who is willing to sit out the course of any battle, willing to cash in on the blood of the innocent or to crawl on his belly to the guilty, who dispenses justice by condemning both the robber and the robbed to jail, who shoves conflicts by ordering the thinker and the fool to meet each other halfway. In any compromise between food and poison, it is only death that

can win. In any compromise between good and evil, it is only evil that can profit. In that transfusion of blood which drains the good to feed the evil, the compromiser is the transmitting rubber tube.

“You, who are half-rational, half-coward, have been playing a con game with reality, but the victim you have conned is yourself. When men reduce their virtues to the approximate, then evil acquires the force of an absolute, when loyalty to an unyielding purpose is dropped by the virtuous, it’s picked up by scoundrels—and you get the indecent spectacle of a cringing, bargaining, traitorous good and a self-righteously uncompromising evil. As you surrendered to the mystics of muscle when they told you that ignorance consists of claiming knowledge, so now you surrender to them when they shriek that immorality consists of pronouncing moral judgment. When they yell that it is selfish to be certain that you are right, you hasten to assure them that you’re certain of nothing. When they shout that it’s immoral to stand on your convictions, you assure them that you have no convictions whatever. When the thugs of Europe’s People’s States snarl that you are guilty of intolerance, because you don’t treat your desire to live and their desire to kill you as a difference of opinion—you cringe and hasten to assure them that you are not intolerant of any horror. When some barefoot bum in some pesthole of Asia yells at you: How dare you be rich—you apologize and beg him to be patient and promise him you’ll give it all away.

“You have reached the blind alley of the treason you committed when you agreed that you had no right to exist. Once, you believed it was ‘only a compromise’: you conceded it was evil to live for yourself, but moral to live for the sake of your children. Then you conceded that it was selfish to live for your children, but moral to live for your community. Then you conceded that it was selfish to live for your community, but moral to live for your country. Now, you are letting this greatest of countries be devoured by any scum from any corner of the earth, while you concede that it is selfish to live for your country and that your moral duty is to live for the globe. A man who has no right to life, has no right to values and will not keep them.

“At the end of your road of successive betrayals, stripped of weapons, of certainty, of honor, you commit your final act of treason and sign your petition of intellectual bankruptcy: while the muscle-mystics of the People’s States proclaim that they’re the champions of reason and science, you agree and hasten to proclaim that *faith* is your cardinal principle, that reason is on the side of your destroyers, but yours is the side of faith. To the struggling remnants of rational honesty in the twisted, bewildered minds of your children, you declare that you can offer no rational argument to support the ideas that created this country, that there is no rational justification for freedom, for property, for justice, for rights, that they rest on a mystical insight and can be accepted only on faith, that in reason and logic the enemy is right, but faith is superior to reason. You declare to your children that it is rational to loot, to torture, to enslave, to expropriate, to murder, but that they must resist the temptations of logic and stick to the discipline of remaining irrational—that skyscrapers, factories, radios, airplanes were the products of faith and mystic intuition, while famines, concentration camps, and firing squads are the products of a reasonable manner of existence—that the industrial revolution was the revolt of the men of faith against that era of reason and logic which is known as the Middle Ages. Simultaneously, in the same breath, to the same child, you declare that the looters who rule the People’s States will surpass this country in material production, since they are the representatives of science, but that it’s evil to be concerned with physical wealth and that one must renounce material prosperity—you declare that the looters’ ideal are noble, but they do not mean them, while you do; that your purpose in fighting the looters is only to accomplish their aims, which they cannot accomplish, but you can; and that the way to fight them is to beat them to it and give one’s wealth

away. Then you wonder why your children join the People's thugs or become half-crazed delinquents, you wonder why the looters' conquests keep creeping closer to your doors—and you blame it on human stupidity, declaring that the masses are impervious to reason.

“You blank out the open, public spectacle of the looters' fight against the mind, and the fact that their bloodiest horrors are unleashed to punish the crime of thinking. You blank out the fact that most mystics of muscle started out as mystics of spirit, that they keep switching from one to the other, that the men you call materialists and spiritualists are only two halves of the same dissected human, forever seeking completion, but seeking it by swinging from the destruction of the flesh to the destruction of the soul and vice versa—that they keep running from your colleges to the slave pens of Europe to an open collapse into the mystic muck of India, seeking any refuge against reality, any form of escape from the mind.

“You blank it out and cling to your hypocrisy of ‘faith’ in order to blank out the knowledge that the looters have a stranglehold upon you, which consists of your moral code—that the looters are the final and consistent practitioners of the morality you're half-obeying, half-evading—that they practice it the only way it can be practiced: by turning the earth into a sacrificial furnace—that your morality forbids you to oppose them in the only way they can be opposed: by refusing to become a sacrificial animal and proudly asserting your right to exist—that in order to fight them to the finish and with full rectitude, *it is your morality that you have to reject*.

“You blank' it out, because your self-esteem is tied to ‘that mystic ‘unselfishness’ which you've never possessed or practiced, but spent so many years pretending to possess that the thought of denouncing it fills you with terror. No value is higher than self-esteem, but you've invested it in counterfeit securities—and now your morality has caught you in a trap where you are forced to protect your self-esteem by fighting for the creed of self-destruction. The grim joke is on you: that need of self-esteem, which you're unable to explain or to define, belongs to *my* morality, not yours; it's the objective token of my code, it is my proof within your own soul.

“By a feeling he has not learned to identify, but has derived from his first awareness of existence, from his discovery that he has to make choices, man knows that his desperate need of self-esteem is a matter of life or death. As a being of volitional consciousness, he knows that he must know his own value in order to maintain his own life. He knows that he has to be *right*; to be wrong in action means danger to his life; to be wrong in person, to be *evil*, means to be unfit for existence.

“Every act of man's life has to be willed; the mere act of obtaining or eating his food implies that the person he preserves is worthy of being preserved; every pleasure he seeks to enjoy implies that the person who seeks it is worthy of finding enjoyment. He has no choice about his need of self-esteem, his only choice is the standard by which to gauge it. And he makes his fatal error when he switches this gauge protecting his life into the service of his own destruction, when he chooses a standard contradicting existence and sets his self-esteem against reality.

“Every form of causeless self-doubt, every feeling of inferiority and secret unworthiness is, in fact, man's hidden dread of his inability to deal with existence. But the greater his terror, the more fiercely he clings to the murderous doctrines that choke him. No man can survive the moment of pronouncing himself irredeemably evil; should he do it, his next moment is insanity or suicide. To escape it—if he's chosen an irrational Standard—he will fake, evade, blank out; he will cheat himself of reality, of existence, of happiness, of mind; and he will ultimately cheat himself of self-esteem by struggling to

preserve its illusion rather than to risk discovering its lack. To fear to face an issue is to believe that the worst is true.

“It is not any crime you have committed that infects your soul with permanent guilt, it is none of your failures, errors or flaws, but the *blank-out* by which you attempt to evade them—it is not any sort of Original Sin or unknown prenatal deficiency, but the knowledge and fact of your basic default, of suspending your mind, of refusing to think. Fear and guilt are your chronic emotions, they are real and you do deserve them, but they don’t come from the superficial reasons you invent to disguise their cause, not from your ‘selfishness,’ weakness or ignorance, but from a real and basic threat to your existence; *fear*, because you have abandoned your weapon of survival, *guilt*, because you know you have done it volitionally.

“The *self* you have betrayed is your mind; *self-esteem* is reliance on one’s power to think. The ego you seek, that essential ‘*you*’ which you cannot express or define, is not your emotions or inarticulate dreams, but your *intellect*, that judge of your supreme tribunal whom you’ve impeached in order to drift at the mercy of any stray shyster you describe as your ‘feeling.’ Then you drag yourself through a self-made night, in a desperate quest for a nameless fire, moved by some fading vision of a dawn you had seen and lost.

“Observe the persistence, in mankind’s mythologies, of the legend about a paradise that men had once possessed, the city of Atlantis or the Garden of Eden or some kingdom of perfection, always behind us. The root of that legend exists, not in the past of the race, but in the past of every man. You still retain a sense—not as firm as a memory, but diffused like the pain of hopeless longing—that somewhere in the starting years of your childhood, before you had learned to submit, to absorb the terror of unreason and to doubt the value of your mind, you had known a radiant state of existence, you had known the independence of a rational consciousness facing an open universe. *That* is the paradise which you have lost, which you seek—which is yours for the taking.

“Some of you will never know who is John Galt. But those of you who have known a single moment of love for existence and of pride in being its worthy lover, a moment of looking at this earth and letting your glance be its sanction, have known the state of being a man, and I—I am only the man who knew that that state is not to be betrayed. I am the man who knew what made it possible and who chose consistently to practice and to be what you had practiced and been in that one moment.

“That choice is yours to make. That choice—the dedication to one’s highest potential—is made by accepting the fact that the noblest act you have ever performed is the act of your mind in the process of grasping that two and two make four.

“Whoever you are—you who are alone with my words in this moment, with nothing but your honesty to help you understand—the choice is still open to be a human being, but the price is to start from scratch, to stand naked in the face of reality and, reversing a costly historical error, to declare: ‘I am, therefore I’ll think.’

“Accept the irrevocable fact that your life depends upon your mind. Admit that the whole of your struggle, your doubts, your fakes, your evasions, was a desperate quest for escape from the responsibility of a volitional consciousness—a quest for automatic knowledge, for instinctive action, for intuitive certainty—and while you called it a longing for the state of an angel, what you were seeking was the state of an animal. Accept, as your moral ideal, the task of becoming a man.

“Do not say that you’re afraid to trust your mind because you know so little. Are you safer in surrendering to mystics and discarding the little that you know? Live and act within the limit of your knowledge and keep expanding it to the limit of your life. Redeem your mind from the hockshops of authority. Accept the fact that you are not omniscient, but playing a zombie will not give you omniscience—that your mind is fallible, but becoming mindless will not make you infallible—that an error made on your own is safer than ten truths accepted on faith, because the first leaves you the means to correct it, but the second destroys your capacity to distinguish truth from error. In place of your dream of an omniscient automation, accept the fact that any knowledge man acquires is acquired by his own will and effort, and that *that* is his distinction in the universe, *that* is his nature, his morality, his glory.

“Discard that unlimited license to evil which consists of claiming that man is imperfect. By what standard do you damn him when you claim it? Accept the fact that in the realm of morality nothing less than perfection will do. But perfection is not to be gauged by mystic commandments to practice the impossible, and your moral stature is not to be gauged by matters not open to your choice. Man has a single basic choice: to think or not, and *that* is the gauge of his virtue. Moral perfection is an *unbreached rationality*—not the degree of your intelligence, but the full and relentless use of your mind, not the extent of your knowledge, but the acceptance of reason as an absolute.

“Learn to distinguish the difference between errors of knowledge and breaches of morality. An error of knowledge is not a moral flaw, provided you are willing to correct it; only a mystic would judge human beings by the standard of an impossible, automatic omniscience. But a breach of morality is the conscious choice of an action you know to be evil, or a willful evasion of knowledge, a suspension of sight and of thought. That which you do not know, is not a moral charge against you; but that which you refuse to know, is an account of infamy growing in your soul. Make every allowance for errors of knowledge; do not forgive or accept any breach of morality. Give the benefit of the doubt to those who seek to know; but treat as potential killers those specimens of insolent depravity who make demands upon you, announcing that they have and seek no reasons, proclaiming, as a license, that they ‘just feel it’—or those who reject an irrefutable argument by saying: ‘It’s only logic,’ which means: ‘It’s only reality.’ The only realm opposed to reality is the realm and premise of death.

“Accept the fact that the achievement of your happiness is the only *moral* purpose of your life, and that *happiness*—not pain or mindless self-indulgence—is the proof of your moral integrity, since it is the proof and the result of your loyalty to the achievement of your values. Happiness was the responsibility you dreaded, it required the kind of rational discipline you did not value yourself enough to assume—and the anxious staleness of your day is the monument to your evasion of the knowledge that there is no moral substitute for happiness, that there is no more despicable coward than the man who deserted the battle for his joy, fearing to assert his right to existence, lacking the courage and the loyalty to life of a bird or a flower reaching for the sun. Discard the protective rags of that vice which you called a virtue: humility—learn to value yourself, which means: to fight for your happiness—and when you learn that *pride* is the sum of all virtues, you will learn to live like a man.

“As a basic step of self-esteem, learn to treat as the mark of a cannibal any man’s *demand* for your help. To demand it is to claim that your life is *his* property—and loathsome as such claim might be, there’s something still more loathsome: your agreement. Do you ask if it’s ever proper to help another man? No—if he claims it as his right or as a moral duty that you owe him. Yes—if such is your own desire based on your own selfish pleasure in the value of his person and his struggle. Suffering as

such is not a value; only man's fight against suffering, is. If you choose to help a man who suffers, do it only on the ground of his virtues, of his right to recover, of his rational record, or of the fact that he suffers unjustly; then your action is still a trade, and his virtue is the payment for your help. Be to help a man who has no virtues, to help him on the ground of his suffering as such, to accept his faults, his *need*, as a claim—is to accept the mortgage of a zero on your values. A man who has no virtues is a hater of existence who acts on the premise of death; to help him is to sanction his evil and to support his career of destruction. Be it only a penny you will not miss or a kindly smile he has not earned, a tribute to a zero is treason to life and to all those who struggle to maintain it. It is of such pennies and smiles that the desolation of your world was made.

“Do not say that my morality is too hard for you to practice and that you fear it as you fear the unknown. Whatever living moments you have known, were lived by the values of *my* code. But you stifled, negated, betrayed it. You kept sacrificing your virtues to your vices, and the best among men to the worst. Look around you: what you have done to society, you have done it first within your soul; one is the image of the other. This dismal wreckage, which is now your world, is the physical form of the treason you committed to your values, to your friends, to your defenders, to your future, to your country, to yourself.

“We—whom you are now calling, but who will not answer any longer—we have lived among you, but you failed to know us, you refused to think and to see what we were. You failed to recognize the motor I invented—and it became, in *your* world, a pile of dead scrap. You failed to recognize the hero in your soul—and you failed to know me when I passed you in the street. When you cried in despair for the unattainable spirit which you felt had deserted your world, you gave it my name, but what you were calling was your own betrayed self-esteem. You will not recover one without the other.

“When you failed to give recognition to man's mind and attempted to rule human beings by force—those who submitted had no mind to surrender; those who had, were men who don't submit. Thus the man of productive genius assumed in *your* world the disguise of a playboy and became a destroyer of wealth, choosing to annihilate his fortune rather than surrender it to guns. Thus the thinker, the man of reason, assumed in *your* world the role of a pirate, to defend his values by force against your force, rather than submit to the rule of brutality. Do you hear me, Francisco d'Anconia and Ragnar Danneskjöld, my first friends, my fellow fighters, my fellow outcasts, in whose name and honor I speak?

“It was the three of us who started what I am now completing. It was the three of us who resolved to avenge this country and to release its imprisoned soul. This greatest of countries was built on *my* morality—on the inviolate supremacy of man's right to exist—but you dreaded to admit it and live up to it. You stared at an achievement unequaled in history, and looted its effects and blanked out its cause. In the presence of that monument to human morality, which is a factory, a highway or a bridge—you kept damning this country as immoral and its progress as ‘material greed,’ you kept offering apologies for this country's greatness to the idol of primordial starvation, to decaying Europe's idol of a leprous, mystic bum.

“This country—the product of *reason*—could not survive on the morality of sacrifice. It was not built by men who sought self-immolation or by men who sought handouts. It could not stand on the mystic split that divorced man's soul from his body. It could not live by the mystic doctrine that damned this earth as evil and those who succeeded on earth as depraved. From its start, this country was a threat to the ancient rule of mystics. In the brilliant rocket-explosion of its youth, this country displayed to an

incredulous world what greatness was possible to man, what happiness was possible on earth. It was one or the other: America or mystics. The mystics knew it; you didn't. You let them infect you with the worship of *need*—and this country became a giant in body with a mooching midget in place of its soul, while its living soul was driven underground to labor and feed you in silence, unnamed, unhonored, negated, its soul and hero: the industrialist. Do you hear me now, Hank Rearden, the greatest of the victims I have avenged?

“Neither he nor the rest of us will return until the road is clear to rebuild this country—until the wreckage of the morality of sacrifice has been wiped out of our way. A country's political system is based on its code of morality. We will rebuild America's system on the moral premise which had been its foundation, but which you treated as a guilty underground, in your frantic evasion of the conflict between that premise and your mystic morality: the premise that man is an end in himself, not the means to the ends of others, that man's life, his freedom, his happiness are *his* by inalienable right.

“You who've lost the concept of a right, you who swing in impotent evasiveness between the claim that rights are a gift of God, a supernatural gift to be taken on faith, or the claim that rights are a gift of society, to be broken at its arbitrary whim—the source of man's rights is not divine law or congressional law, but the law of identity. A is A—and Man is Man. *Rights* are conditions of existence required by man's nature for his proper survival. If man is to live on earth, it is *right* for him to use his mind, his *right* to act on his own free judgment, it is *right* to work for his values and to keep the product of his work. If life on earth is his purpose, he has a *right* to live as a rational being: nature forbids him the irrational. Any group, any gang, any nation that attempts to negate man's rights, is *wrong*, which means: is evil, which means: is anti-life.

“*Rights* are a moral concept—and morality is a matter of choice. Men are free not to choose man's survival as the standard of their morals and their laws, but not free to escape from the fact that the alternative is a cannibal society, which exists for a while by devouring its best and collapses like a cancerous body, when the healthy have been eaten by the diseased, when the rational have been consumed by the irrational. Such has been the fate of your societies in history, but you've evaded the knowledge of the cause. I am here to state it: the agent of retribution was the law of identity, which you cannot escape. Just as man cannot live by means of the irrational, so two men cannot, or two thousand, or two billion. Just as man can't succeed by defying reality, so a nation can't, or a country, or a globe. A is A. The rest is a matter of time, provided by the generosity of victims.

“Just as man can't exist without his body, so no rights can exist without the right to translate one's rights into reality—to think, to work and to keep the results—which means: the right of property. The modern mystics of muscle who offer you the fraudulent alternative of 'human rights' versus 'property rights,' as if one could exist without the other, are making a last, grotesque attempt to revive the doctrine of soul versus body. Only a ghost can exist without material property; only a slave can work with no right to the product of his effort. The doctrine that 'human rights' are superior to 'property rights' simply means that some human beings have the right to make property out of others; since the competent have nothing to gain from the incompetent, it means the right of the incompetent to own their betters and to use them as productive cattle. Whoever regards this as human and right, has no right to the title of 'human.'

“The source of property rights is the law of causality. All property and all forms of wealth are produced by man's mind and labor. As you cannot have effects without causes, so you cannot have wealth without its source: without intelligence. You cannot force intelligence to work: those who're

able to think, will not work under compulsion: those who will, won't produce much more than the price of the whip needed to keep them enslaved. You cannot obtain the products of a mind except on the owner's terms, by trade and by volitional consent. Any other policy of men toward man's poverty is the policy of criminals, no matter what their numbers. Criminals are savages who play in short-range and starve when their prey runs out—just as you're starving today, you who believed that crime could be 'practical' if your government decreed that robbery was legal and resistance to robbery illegal.

"The only proper purpose of a government is to protect man's rights, which means: to protect him from physical violence. A proper government is only a policeman, acting as an agent of man's self-defense, and, as such, may resort to force *only* against those who *start the* use of force. The only proper functions of a government are: the police, to protect you from criminals; the army, to protect you from foreign invaders; and the courts, to protect your property and contracts from breach or fraud by others, to settle disputes by rational rules, according to *objective* law. But a government that *initiates* the employment of force against men who had forced no one, the employment of armed compulsion against disarmed victims, is a nightmare infernal machine designed to annihilate morality: such a government reverses its only moral purpose and switches from the role of protector to the role of man's deadliest enemy, from the role of policeman to the role of a criminal vested with the right to the wielding of violence against victims deprived of the right of self-defense. Such a government substitutes for morality the following rule of social conduct: you may do whatever you please to your neighbor, provided your gang is bigger than his.

"Only a brute, a fool or an evader can agree to exist on such terms or agree to give his fellow men a blank check on his life and his mind, to accept the belief that others have the right to dispose of his person at their whim, that the will of the majority is Omnipotent, that the physical force of muscles and numbers is a substitute for justice, reality and truth. We, the men of the mind, we who are traders, not masters or slaves, do not deal in blank checks or grant them. We do not live or work with any form of the non-objective.

"So long as men, in the era of savagery, had no concept of objective reality and believed that physical nature was ruled by the whim of unknowable demons—no thought, no science, no production were possible. Only when men discovered that nature was a firm, predictable absolute were they able to rely on their knowledge, to choose their course, to plan their future and, slowly, to rise from the cave. *Now* you have placed modern industry, with its immense complexity of scientific precision, back into the power of unknowable demons—the unpredictable power of the arbitrary whims of hidden, ugly little bureaucrats. A farmer will not invest the effort of one summer if he's unable to calculate his chances of a harvest. But you expect industrial giants—who plan in terms of decades, invest in terms of generations and undertake ninety-nine-year contracts—to continue to function and produce, not knowing what random caprice in the skull of what random official will descend upon them at what moment to demolish the whole of their effort. Drifters and physical laborers live and plan by the range of a day. The better the mind, the longer the range. A man whose vision extends to a shanty, might continue to build on your quicksands, to grab a fast profit and run. A man who envisions skyscrapers, will not. Nor will he give ten years of unswerving devotion to the task of inventing a new product, when he knows the gangs of entrenched mediocrity are juggling the laws against him, to tie him, restrict him and force him to fail, but should he fight them and struggle and succeed, they will seize his rewards and his invention.

“Look past the range of the moment, you who cry that you fear to compete with men of superior intelligence, that their mind is a threat to your livelihood, that the strong leave no chance to the weak in a market of voluntary trade. What determines the material value of your work? Nothing but the productive effort of your mind—if you lived on a desert island. The less efficient the thinking of your brain, the less your physical labor would bring you—and you could spend your life on a single routine, collecting a precarious harvest or hunting with bow and arrows, unable to think any further. But when you live in a rational society, where men are free to trade, you receive an incalculable bonus: the material value of your work is determined not only by your effort, but by the effort of the best productive minds who exist in the world around you.

“When you work in a modern factory, you are paid, not only for your labor, but for all the productive genius which has made that factory possible: for the work of the industrialist who built it, for the work of the investor who saved the money to risk on the untried and the new, for the work of the engineer who designed the machines of which you are pushing the levers, for the work of the inventor who created the product which you spend your time on making, for the work of the scientist who discovered the laws that went into the making of that product, for the work of the philosopher who taught men how to think and whom you spend your time denouncing.

“The machine, the frozen form of a living intelligence, is the power that expands the potential of your life by raising the productivity of your time. If you worked as a blacksmith in the mystics’ Middle Ages, the whole of your earning capacity would consist of an iron bar produced by your hands in days and days of effort. How many tons of rail do you produce per day if you work for Hank Rearden? Would you dare to claim that the size of your pay check was created solely by your physical labor and that those rails were the product of your muscles? The standard of living of that blacksmith is all that your muscles are worth; the rest is a gift from Hank Rearden.

“Every man is free to rise as far as he’s able or willing, but it’s only the degree to which he thinks that determines the degree to which he’ll rise. Physical labor as such can extend no further than the range of the moment. The man who does no more than physical labor, consumes the material value-equivalent of his own contribution to the process of production, and leaves no further value, neither for himself nor others. But the man who produces an idea in any field of rational endeavor—the man who discovers new knowledge—is the permanent benefactor of humanity. Material products can’t be shared, they belong to some ultimate consumer; it is only the value of an idea that can be shared with unlimited numbers of men, making all sharers richer at no one’s sacrifice or loss, raising the productive capacity of whatever labor they perform. It is the value of his own time that the strong of the intellect transfers to the weak, letting them work on the jobs he discovered, while devoting his time to further discoveries. This is mutual trade to mutual advantage; the interests of the mind are one, no matter what the degree of intelligence, among men who desire to work and don’t seek or expect the unearned.

“In proportion to the mental energy he spent, the man who creates a new invention receives but a small percentage of his value in terms of material payment, no matter what fortune he makes, no matter what millions he earns. But the man who works as a janitor in the factory producing that invention, receives an enormous payment in proportion to the mental effort that his job requires of *him*. And the same is true of all men between, on all levels of ambition and ability. The man at the top of the intellectual pyramid contributes the most to all those below him, but gets nothing except his material payment, receiving no intellectual bonus from others to add to the value of his time. The man

at the bottom who, left to himself, would starve in his hopeless ineptitude, contributes nothing to those above him, but receives the bonus of all of their brains. Such is the nature of the 'competition' between the strong and the weak of the intellect. Such is the pattern of 'exploitation' for which you have damned the strong.

"Such was the service we had given you and were glad and willing to give. What did we ask in return? Nothing but freedom. We required that you leave us free to function—free to think and to work as we choose—free to take our own risks and to bear our own losses—free to earn our own profits and to make our own fortunes—free to gamble on *your* rationality, to submit our products to your judgment for the purpose of a voluntary trade, to rely on the objective value of our work and on your mind's ability to see it—free to count on your intelligence and honesty, and to deal with nothing but your mind. Such was the price we asked, which you chose to reject as too high. You decided to call it unfair that we, who had dragged you out of your hovels and provided you with modern apartments, with radios, movies and cars, should own our palaces and yachts—you decided that *you* had a right to your wages, but *we* had no right to our profits, that you did not want us to deal with your mind, but to deal, instead, with your gun. Our answer to *that*, was: 'May you be damned!' Our answer came true. You are.

"You did not care to compete in terms of intelligence—you are now competing in terms of brutality. You did not care to allow rewards to be won by successful production—you are now running a race in which rewards are won by successful plunder. You called it selfish and cruel that men should trade value for value—you have now established an unselfish society where they trade extortion for extortion. Your system is a legal civil war, where men gang up on one another and struggle for possession of the law, which they use as a club over rivals, till another gang wrests it from their clutch and clubs them with it in their turn, all of them clamoring protestations of service to an unnamed public's unspecified good. You had said that you saw no difference between economic and political power, between the power of money and the power of guns—no difference between reward and punishment, no difference between purchase and plunder, no difference between pleasure and fear, no difference between life and death. You are learning the difference now.

"Some of you might plead the excuse of your ignorance, of a limited mind and a limited range. But the damned and the guiltiest among you are the men who *had* the capacity to know, yet chose to blank out reality, the men who were willing to steel their intelligence into cynical servitude to force: the contemptible breed of those mystics of science who profess a devotion to some sort of 'pure knowledge'—the purity consisting of their claim that such knowledge has no practical purpose on this earth—who reserve their logic for inanimate matter, but believe that the subject of dealing with men requires and deserves no rationality, who scorn money and sell their souls in exchange for a laboratory supplied by loot. And since there is no such thing as 'non-practical knowledge' or any sort of 'disinterested' action, since they scorn the use of their science for the purpose and profit of life, they deliver their science to the service of death, to the only practical purpose it can ever have for looters: to inventing weapons of coercion and destruction. They, the intellects who seek escape from moral values, *they* are the damned on their *earth*, theirs is the guilt beyond forgiveness. Do you hear me, Dr. Robert Stadler?

"But it is not to him that I wish to speak. I am speaking to those among you who have retained some sovereign shred of their soul, unsold and unstamped: '—to the order of others.' If, in the chaos of the motives that have made you listen to the radio tonight, there was an honest, *rational* desire to

learn what is wrong with the world, you are the man whom I wished to address. By the rules and terms of my code, one owes a rational statement to those whom it does concern and who're making an effort to know. Those who're making an effort to fail to understand me, are not a concern of mine.

"I am speaking to those who desire to live and to recapture the honor of their soul. Now that you know the truth about your world *stop supporting your own destroyers*. The evil of the world is made possible by nothing but the sanction to give it. Withdraw your sanction. Withdraw your support. Do not try to live on your enemies' terms or to win at a game where they're setting the rules. Do not seek the favor of those who enslaved you, do not beg for alms from those who have robbed you, be it subsidies, loans or jobs, do not join their team to recoup what they've taken by helping them rob your neighbors. One cannot hope to maintain one's life by accepting bribes to condone one's destruction. Do not straggle for profit, success or security at the price of a lien on your right to exist. Such a lien is not to be paid off; the more you pay them, the more they will demand; the greater the values you seek or achieve, the more vulnerably helpless you become. There is a system of *white blackmail* devised to bleed you, not by means of your sins, but by means of your love for existence.

"Do not attempt to rise on the looters' terms or to climb a ladder while they're holding the ropes. Do not allow their hands to touch the only power that keeps them in power: your living ambition. Go on strike—in the manner I did. Use your mind and skill in private, extend your knowledge, develop your ability, but do not share your achievements with others. Do not try to produce a fortune, with a looter riding on your back. Stay on the lowest rung of their ladder, earn no more than your barest survival, do not make an extra penny to support the looters' state. Since you're captive, act as a captive, do not help them pretend that you're free. Be the silent, incorruptible enemy they dread. When they force you, obey—but *do not volunteer*. Never volunteer a step in their direction, or a wish, or a plea, or a purpose. Do not help a holdup man to claim that he acts as your friend and benefactor. Do not help your jailers to pretend that their jail is your natural state of existence. Do not help them to fake reality. That fake is the only dam holding off their secret terror, the terror of knowing they're unfit to exist; remove it and let them drown; your sanction is their only life belt.

"If you find a chance to vanish into some wilderness out of their reach, do so, but not to exist as a bandit or to create a gang competing with their racket; build a productive life of your own with those who accept your moral code and are willing to struggle for a human existence. You have no chance to win on the Morality of Death or by the code of faith and force; raise a standard to which the honest *will* repair: the standard of Life and Reason.

"Act as a rational being and aim at becoming a rallying point for all those who are starved for a voice of integrity—act on your rational values, whether alone in the midst of your enemies, or with a few of your chosen friends, or as the founder of a modest community on the frontier of mankind's rebirth.

"When the looters' state collapses, deprived of the best of its slaves, when it falls to a level of impotent chaos, like the mystic-ridden nations of the Orient, and dissolves into starving robber gangs fighting to rob one another—when the advocates of the morality of sacrifice perish with their final ideal—then and on that day we will return.

"We will open the gates of our city to those who deserve to enter, a city of smokestacks, pipe lines, orchards, markets and inviolate homes. We will act as the rallying center for such hidden outposts as you'll build. With the sign of the dollar as our symbol—the sign of free trade and free minds—we will

move to reclaim this country once more from the impotent savages who never discovered its nature, its meaning, its splendor. Those who choose to join us, will join us; those who don't, will not have the power to stop us; hordes of savages have never been an obstacle to men who carried the banner of the mind.

"Then this country will once more become a sanctuary for a vanishing species: the rational being. The political system we will build is contained in a single moral premise: no man may obtain any values from others by resorting to physical force. Every man will stand or fall, live or die by his rational judgment. If he fails to use it and falls, he will be his only victim. If he fears that his judgment is inadequate, he will not be given a gun to improve it. If he chooses to correct his errors in time, he will have the unobstructed example of his betters, for guidance in learning to think; but an end will be put to the infamy of paying with one life for the errors of another.

"In that world, you'll be able to rise in the morning with the spirit you have known in your childhood: that spirit of eagerness, adventure and certainty which comes from dealing with a rational universe. No child is afraid of nature; it is your fear of men that will vanish, the fear that has stunted your soul, the fear you acquired in your early encounters with the incomprehensible, the unpredictable, the contradictory, the arbitrary, the hidden, the faked, *the irrational* in men. You will live in a world of responsible beings, who will be as consistent and reliable as facts; the guarantee of their character will be a system of existence where objective reality is the standard of the judge. Your virtues will be given protection, your vices and weaknesses will not. Every chance will be open to your good, none will be provided for your evil. What you'll receive from men will not be alms, or pity, or mercy, or forgiveness of sins, but a single value: *justice*. And when you'll look at men or at yourself, you will feel, not disgust, suspicion and guilt, but a single constant: *respect*.

"Such is the future you are capable of winning. It requires a struggle; so does any human value. All life is a purposeful struggle, and your only choice is the choice of a goal. Do you wish to continue the battle of your present or do you wish to fight for my world? Do you wish to continue a struggle that consists of clinging to precarious ledges in a sliding descent to the abyss, a struggle where the hardships you endure are irreversible and the victories you win bring you closer to destruction? Or do you wish to undertake a struggle that consists of rising from ledge to ledge in a steady ascent to the top, a struggle where the hardships are investments in your future, and the victories bring you irreversibly closer to the world of your moral ideal, and should you die without reaching full sunlight, you will die on a level touched by its rays? Such is the choice before you. Let your mind and your love of existence decide.

"The last of my words will be addressed to those heroes who might still be hidden in the world, those who are held prisoner, not by their evasions, but by their virtues and their desperate courage. My brothers in spirit, check on your virtues and on the nature of the enemies you're serving. Your destroyers hold you by means of your endurance, your generosity, your innocence, your love—the endurance that carries their burdens—the generosity that responds to their cries of despair—the innocence that is unable to conceive of their evil and gives them the benefit of every doubt, refusing to condemn them without understanding and incapable of understanding such motives as theirs—the love, your love of life, which makes you believe that they are men and that they love it, too. But the world of today is the world they wanted; life is the object of their hatred. Leave them to the death they worship. In the name of your magnificent devotion to this earth, leave them, don't exhaust the greatness of your soul on achieving the triumph of the evil of theirs. Do you hear me ... my love?

“In the name of the best within you, do not sacrifice this word to those who are its worst. In the name of the values that keep you alive, do not let your vision of man be distorted by the ugly, the cowardly, the mindless in those who have never achieved his title. Do not lose your knowledge that man’s proper estate is an upright posture, an intransigent mind and a step that travels unlimited roads. Do not let your fire go out, spark by irreplaceable spark, in the hopeless swamps of the approximate, the not-quite, the not-yet, the not-at-all. Do not let the hero in your soul perish, in lonely frustration for the life you deserved, but have never been able to reach. Check your road and the nature of your battle. The world you desired can be won, it exists, it is real, it is possible, it’s yours.

“But to win it requires your total dedication and a total break with the world of your past, with the doctrine that man is a sacrificial animal who exists for the pleasure of others. Fight for the value of your person. Fight for the virtue of your pride. Fight for the essence of that which is man: for his sovereign rational mind. Fight with the radiant certainty and the absolute rectitude of knowing that yours is the Morality of Life and that yours is the battle for any achievement, any value, any grandeur, any goodness, any joy that has ever existed on this earth.

“You will win when you are ready to pronounce the oath I have taken at the start of my battle—and for those who wish to know the day of my return, I shall now repeat it to the hearing of the world:

“I swear—by my life and my love of it—that I will never live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for mine.”