

WHY MAN NEEDS APPROVAL

By Marsha Enright

Originally published in *Objectivity*, Volume 1, Number 2.

In Ayn Rand's novel, *Atlas Shrugged*, Ken Danagger asks Dagny Taggart: "And if you met those great men in heaven, . . . what would you want to say to them?"

"Just . . . just hello, I guess."

"That's not all," said Danagger. "There's something you'd want to hear from them . . . you'd want them to look at you and say, Well done."

She dropped her head and nodded silently. . . . (Rand 1957, 735)

In this passage, Dagny shows an intense desire to be recognized and appreciated by heroes. She was not the sort of character who desired false praise or approval of others in place of self-approval. She did desire a deserved approval, a recognition of her and her achievements.

Why?

In this essay, I shall argue that it is a part of man's nature, of his animal as well as his rational nature, to desire positive responses from others. The desire to be liked by others, to have pleasant day-to-day interactions with other people, and to enjoy positive feedback on many levels of social interaction is a need of man's conceptual *and* perceptual nature. It is a vital factor in human development. A person cannot experience the most happiness possible in life if this deep need is left unfulfilled.

Aristotle posed the question: Why does a happy and self-sufficient man need friends? His answer was an early forerunner of the view elaborated here: A good man gets pleasure from contemplation of the good, a friend is another self, and "we can contemplate our neighbors better than ourselves and their actions better than our own." Therefore, the supremely happy man will need good friends because "his purpose is to contemplate worthy actions and actions that are his own, and the actions of a good man who is his friend have both these qualities" (Aristotle 1941, *EN.9.9.1169b30-1170a4*).

I. Concretizing the Self

Ayn Rand spent much of her career **defending and explaining man's unique form of consciousness — reason**. She explored such issues as how the ability to reason distinguishes man from the other animals, **how reason works, and why man needs freedom to use his reason**. She explained a number of man's most interesting and unique characteristics as being caused by his possession of reason.

Rand argued that man produces and needs art because his conceptual consciousness has a special need to concretize its basic grasp of reality (Rand 1975, 17–20). Nathaniel Branden, an associate of Rand's, **argued that man needs romantic love because, unlike introspective awareness, love enables man to perceive his self in the world** (Branden 1969, 184–88, 195–98). These theories propose that art and love derive specifically from the need to integrate the abstract and the concrete, the conceptual and the perceptual. **Man is a rational animal and, as such, has cognitive needs resulting from his animal nature in combination with his rational faculty.** Abstractions themselves exist only in man's mind — everything else in reality is concrete. **One of man's fundamental cognitive needs is to concretize his ideas and values, to grasp what they mean in reality.** Rand surmised that the function of words is to give abstractions concrete forms (Rand 1990, 10). Man cannot think without finding particular forms for his thought. I would further argue that only the faculty of abstraction, of reason, can handle abstractions directly. Man's other cognitive faculties, such as perception, memory, and eidetic imagination, function by using perceptual, concrete forms in conjunction with abstractions. Memories or **fantasies always use a perceptual mental image — be it visual, auditory, tactile, gustatory, or kinesthetic — to mentally anchor abstractions, to give them concrete form** (Koestler 1964; Hadamard 1954).

These cognitive facts make sense in light of the evolution of man's cognitive hierarchy. All living things are organized hierarchically, the higher forms always subsuming the lower form's organization within them. (Aristotle discerned this general pattern; see, e.g., *De An.* 2.2.413a20–415b7, 3.9–3.13.) In the organization of consciousness, this means that at each phylogenetic level, animals possess within them the general cognitive

abilities of the lower levels. The phylogenetic classification schemes used in biology reflect increasing modes of awareness — from rudimentary sensations to elaborate ones, to perception of entities and the faculty of memory, etc. (Green 1987, 20–23, 169–81). Of all his cognitive faculties, only the rational level of man’s consciousness is distinctively human, but this level must work with the sensory and perceptual levels of cognition for knowledge to be produced. Reason must find concrete forms for its product to be used by memory, imagination, and perception.

This is true of all of man’s mental contents, whether they be factual or evaluative. Man needs to objectify his values as well as his knowledge. One can be immediately, perceptually aware of objects and persons in external reality, but cannot be so aware of one’s own self and one’s own long-range, deepest-held values. To a great extent, art fulfills the need to concretize one’s greatest values. Rand’s esthetic theory outlines how this occurs. She followed Aristotle’s idea that art is what might be and ought to be: “Art is the selective re-creation of reality according to the artist’s metaphysical value judgment’s” (Rand 1975, 19).

Art essentializes the way in which man should look at the world, rendering concretely the essence of the deepest values of the artistic creator. Here we need to lay aside the thorny question of what architecture and music might re-create. Consider some arts that Rand examined in her writings on esthetics: fiction, painting, sculpture, and dance (ibid., 44–50, 66–70). Rand proposed that these various arts give man the experience of using his senses conceptually; they essentialize the experience of the sense. “The visual arts . . . do not deal with the sensory field of awareness as such, but with the sensory field as perceived by a conceptual consciousness” (ibid., 47). Painting does so with vision, sculpture with touch and vision, and dance with body movement. These arts show men how their reason should direct the way in which they perceive the world, these arts show them to what to pay attention. Fiction, which includes novels, stories, movies, and plays, concretize abstractions by using words to (re)create specific people and events.

In any artwork, the artist’s values dictate what parts of reality are represented and in what way. What he selects to show in the work effectively tells the viewer “this is what’s important about the world, this is

what you should notice about life.” The difference between the voluptuous beauty of a Vargas girl and the perfectly rendered decay of an Ivan Albright woman illustrates this effect.

The cognitive and motivational purpose of art is to make the potential seem real. Thus one experiences concretely and is moved to pursue what one loves (or, in the case of Naturalistic art, be justified in not striving for great things in life). Rand called this the “psychoepistemology of art.” Art integrates into a real, concrete thing (the artwork) the deepest, most essential values which a man holds, so that he may feel as if he perceives them existing, and thus be moved to act toward them.

Those values most important to man are, on the whole, very abstract — self-esteem, success, honor, justice, to name a few. They are not easily nor quickly obtained, and, even when they are, they are not always easily recognized. For example, a businesswoman may not realize that her business is successful or that it is failing. The amount of money coming in, alone, is not a sure measure of success. The businesswoman needs to know her costs, including those for materials, labor, and overhead, to weigh against sales in order to calculate success or failure. Recognizing success sometimes requires a complex process of abstraction; it is not necessarily self-evident.

This is generally true of man’s greatest values. It is a long, arduous process to recognize, plan for, and achieve one’s highest values. Art enables man to experience important values as if they were here and now, as if the essentials were concretely before him. This gives man the experience of their actual existence. It is both thrilling to experience their existence, and inspiring. One walks away from a positive artistic experience feeling “that’s what life should be like” — and feeling motivated to achieve it.

Rand’s favorite metaphor for art was “fuel for the spirit.” Seventeen thousand years ago, the cavemen of Lascaux needed this fuel and painted elaborate and beautiful scenes of the hunt to energize them for their work; modern men need this experience no less.

However, the experience of art is not interactive. It is a one-way process, from the artwork to one’s consciousness. The viewer either “gets it” or does not. Furthermore, although works of art can mirror a person’s

essential values, art does not reflect an individual, particular self (except the self of the creator).

In *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand used the metaphor of a mirror to communicate, exquisitely, an occasion of love — Dagny Taggart and John Galt in reflection of each other:

It was not the pressure of a hand that made her tremble, but the instantaneous sum of its meaning, the knowledge that it was his hand. . . . It contained her pride in herself and that it should be she whom he had chosen as his mirror, that it should be her body which was now giving him the sum of his existence, as his body was giving her the sum of hers. (Rand 1957, 956–57)

In an explication of the psychology of romantic love, Branden also turns to the mirror metaphor. He contends that one's need of love is a consequence of one's rational nature; it derives from a need to objectify one's deepest values of self. Men want their souls to be psychologically "visible" — understood and valued — by others as a means of objectification (Branden 1969, 184–88; cf., Sartre 1966, 344–47).

Man's highest value, his own self, is something he can never perceptually experience as an integrated, whole, and concrete thing. He can only focus on some one specific aspect of his self at any one time. The rest of his self can only be grasped by him abstractly, by reflecting on and integrating all he knows about himself into an imagined picture. He cannot experience himself concretely as a whole person — a personality — as he can experience others. He cannot see the facial expressions or body movements he makes nor hear the tone of his voice as he could perceive these things about another person.

"Normally man experiences himself as a process — in that consciousness itself is a process, an activity, and the contents of man's mind are a shifting flow of perceptions, thoughts, and emotions . . . the sum total of which can never be held in focal awareness at any one time; that sum is experienced, but not perceived as such" (Branden 1969, 185–86). Only the understanding and reactions of another consciousness can give him concrete, specific, and timely feedback about himself. Others can experience his personality concretely, and, through their reactions and

appreciation, give to him a concrete, immediate experience of himself (see also Nozick 1981, 464–65).

A man gets enjoyment from the appreciation of others through verbal expressions and, especially, through the actions and emotional reactions of others. Men seem to be tuned into the emotional reactions of others

(Hoffman 1981, 74–79). On occasion men can experience these reactions viscerally — in their guts. Another’s response seems to be able to affect emotions very directly. It appears that certain facial expressions, tones of voice, and body postures can themselves induce pleasure and pain.

Man does not have automatic knowledge of what is the right food to eat, but foods that are good for him generally taste and smell good, and foods that are not good, even though not deadly, have ill effects from which he learns soon enough (Ornstein and Sobel 1989; Binswanger 1990, 129–34, 202). Man’s nature determines what foods are of value to him, and his mind and body function so as to discriminate what is good or bad through pleasure and pain. More generally, man does not have automatic knowledge of what to value, but man’s actual needs are set by his nature.

Man needs some social interaction. For any individual, social facility is an objective strategic value. Moreover, given the right people, sociability can be a pleasure. Rand’s fictional characters — the virtuous ones — strike one with their independence and devotion to productive work. Yet it is with just these characters that Rand is able to convey so well, in a scene in *The Fountainhead*, the feel of genuine sociability. After work Roark, Mallory, Dominique, and Mike

...sat together in Mallory’s shack. . . . They did not speak about their work. Mallory told outrageous stories and Dominique laughed like a child. They talked about nothing in particular, sentences that had meaning only in the sound of the voices, in the warm gaiety, in the ease of complete relaxation. They were simply four people who liked being there together. (Rand 1943, 357–58)

Society is a human value. Since the mind is an individual function, independence is also a value. Flourishing requires social interaction and independence. Howard Roark, the protagonist of *The Fountainhead*, is an independent man who thinks for himself. He is fundamentally indifferent toward the beliefs and feelings of others when determining the truth of a

matter. He always aims at discerning the truth, and he never disregards it. This does not mean that he has no feeling for others, nor that he finds no pleasure in being liked by others. Roark's friend, Gail Wynand, speaking to Roark:

"Howard, this is what I wanted. To have you here with me."

"I know."

[later] "I'm glad you admit that you have friends."

"I even admit that I love them." (ibid., 655, 660)

II. Animal Company

Enjoyment of interactions with other sentient beings is not confined to the human species. Branden began to isolate the principle of psychological visibility, so pervasive in human life, while playing with his dog, Muttnik. In his own pleasure with the play, Branden noticed an element of self-awareness. Muttnik understood and responded appropriately to the Branden's false boxing. She was understanding the man's intentions and returning them (Branden 1969, 184–85).

Branden explained his enjoyment as consequent to self-objectification. I have always wondered, though, why Muttnik wanted to play with Branden. The dog had no rational consciousness striving for objectification of its abstract nature. The dog would not be subject to the need for psychological visibility, at least not as the need has been articulated by Branden.

However, **the higher animals do have a grasp of reality above mere sensation or stimulus-response** (Koestler 1967, 3–18; Green 1987, 313–18; Binswanger 1990, 7–15, 30–36). **They have generalizing and processing abilities, at the perceptual level, that take them far beyond mere response to stimulus** (Prosser 1986, 433–35). They have a rather sophisticated perceptual grasp of events, causal relations, and emotions. Pigeons in experiment have exhibited the ability to visually generalize; they were able to recognize any one of forty — two typographic forms of the letter A. Dog's apprehensions of causal relations are impressive; one dog is reported to have run down two stories of a building after having seen a piece of meat thrown out a window (Walker 1983, 255, 292).

The facial expressions, body positions, and vocalizations attending some emotions seem to be common to a number of animals, particularly mammals. The wolf and the chimpanzee are favorite illustrations in psychology texts. The dog's grasp of human intentions appears to entail an interspecific grasp of emotions. Even though we look very different from dogs, they are able to read our faces. They can sometimes grasp the meaning of our facial expressions and body postures. Apparently, they are able to match them with their own experience of emotions and to anticipate concomitant behavior. Dogs accomplish these things with only a perceptual, automatic level of consciousness. This suggests that the perceptual, automatic faculties of human consciousness may afford a similar ability.

Dogs not only enjoy playful interaction with humans but actively seek it. They are not the only animals to do so. Dolphins are known for their playfulness and friendliness. There are reports from "dolphin encounter" centers in Florida that male dolphins are sometimes attracted to and pursue human females in the water. Considering the differences in dolphin and human anatomy, it seems remarkable that the dolphins can sort out the women; probably through scent (Chicago Tribune, March 1989). Many of the higher-order animals, given the proper circumstances, seek and enjoy positive interactions with members of other species. The gorilla Koko who kept a kitten, the killer whales at Sea World who swim by their trainers to be petted, the dogs and cats in the same household who become buddies, are but a few examples. The ability of animals, including humans, to recognize emotions and intentions across species argues for a specific biologically built-in means of emotional recognition.

Animals whose nature requires them to live in a cooperative group for their well-being tend to have more advanced communication skills than other species. Concomitantly, they are more sensitive and responsive to members of other species, and they have more need of interaction (Dunbar 1988, 179-81).

The extent to which a particular type of animal depends on a social group for survival goes hand-in-hand with its sensitivity to the emotions and actions of other group members (Hoffman 1981, 79). The dog's emotional sensitivity is a major source of its appeal to humans; it is more popular as

a pet than the cat. By emotional sensitivity, I mean the great amount of attention which the dog pays to the emotions and emotional reactions of other animals, especially humans, the amount of pleasure or pain which others' emotions illicit in the dog, and the swift and direct effect the emotional reactions of others can have on a dog's actions. The dog is also very emotionally expressive, which makes its reactions to things relatively easy to grasp.

The cat is seen as more aloof and independent in its character and not so much in need of interaction. When we come home, the cat runs to see us, purrs, and rubs against us. It may follow us around and may jump upon us for petting when we sit down. In those behaviors, the cat expresses its gladness to see us. But the cat's face does not express subtle changes of emotion the way the eyebrows, eyes, and tongue of the dog do. The cat responds most to our touching, petting, and scratching of it, not to our words of interest or praise. Unlike the dog, the cat is only slightly responsive to our praise. Scoldings or anger might send a cat fleeing, but, unlike the dog, its body does not show that it feels guilty or crestfallen at our disapproval.

In the wild, the dog's survival depends on a complex series of orchestrated group actions for the hunt. Wild dogs live in packs. The cat, with the exception of the lion, is a lone hunter and normally lives alone or with a family. The relative ease with which the dog is controlled by human voice and language is probably a reflection of the use of voice to control and direct social relationships and actions in the pack.

Higher orders of intelligence in animals covary roughly with the amount of complex group interaction in the species (Dunbar 1988, 181–82; Plotkin 1988, 156–59). The need for interaction is a result of the activities necessary for the growth of a complex intelligence. The need for interaction is a fusion of the cognitive with the motivational for survival purposes; cognitive development is advanced during the pursuit of pleasurable interactions.

III. Interaction in Development

In the 1950's, Rene Spitz found that infants raised in orphanages sometimes developed **marasmus** (from the Greek, to waste away). These children were well-cared for physically, but, because help was short, they lacked human interaction. No one had time to cuddle them, play with them, talk to them. Consequently, many of these infants became very withdrawn, silent, and unresponsive. They sucked their thumbs in their cribs, rocked themselves, and did not eat well. They did not thrive. Some died. The **antidote** to marasmus **was human interaction** — **positive feedback** (Bowlby 1965). The rise in foster homes was, in large part, due to the recognition of the marasmus syndrome.

Similar problems have been reported for rhesus monkeys raised in isolation. Infant monkeys in a laboratory were allowed to view others but were prevented from physically interacting with them. When not merely withdrawn and sickly, these babies were autistic, rocking continuously for comfort and fearing interaction greatly. They often became self-mutilating. The addition of a soft cloth-on-wire mother greatly ameliorated the marasmus, although those raised by cloth mothers were not free of problems, since their isolation prevented them from learning many important skills. These infants spent most of their time clinging to the cloth mother even when milk was available from a plain wire mother. A cloth mother who rocked was preferred over the static cloth one and seemed to reduce the number of monkeys who rocked themselves obsessively (Harlow 1959).

The greater normality of the cloth-raised monkeys implies that pleasurable tactile interactions are important to the development of the mind of the infant rhesus monkey. Abnormalities such as marasmus among infant humans imply a similar need for physical contact. **Touch is the first and most immediate sense through which positive feedback is needed, recognized, and delivered. It remains a very important avenue of feedback throughout life. It offers the most concrete evidence of the existence and response of others** (Montague 1971, 51-182, 272-92).

The pleasure that an adult and an infant each derive from interaction with the other helps to motivate both for the goal of helping the infant develop. The very appearance, sounds, and activities of babies — those pesky, needful little creatures — gives so much pleasure to adults. I think this is

nature's way of insuring that we shall take care of them. The adult emotional reaction to babies seems to be interspecific. Adult animals often seem to recognize the young of other species and treat them accordingly (often, more tolerantly). Dogs put up with the shenanigans and abuse of children when they would not from adults. I have a cat who will tolerate pulling, rough petting, jumping on, and so forth from babies, kittens, and puppies, but begins to whack these selfsame individuals for the same behavior after they pass through **puberty**. In-built perceptual recognition processes of certain kinds of facial expressions, tones of voice, gestures, and movements — some causing pleasure, others pain — work to enable adult animals to recognize the young and to treat them accordingly. Niko Tinbergen contended that the smallness of the fledgling's body and the roundness of its head elicit positive emotions from adult birds for the fledgling (Walker 1983, 213; on primates, see Alley 1986).

Humans certainly possess such in-built recognition and response processes for the young and between the young and adults. Two-week-old infants prefer to look at pictures of faces over those of other objects. The human face is one of the most compelling attractors of infant attention during the first four months (Wood 1989, 63).

Infants are able to smile within the first few weeks (Schultz 1976, 27–29). Parents try to make the infant smile; they enjoy it immensely without really knowing why. Intuitively, they act to cause the infant to smile and reward the infant's smile by demonstrating pleasure when it appears. The smile of the infant evokes the smile of the mother, which in turn increases the intensity of the pleasure evoked by the smiling, in a **positive feedback loop** (Pines 1987, 21, 23). **Smiling affords an opportunity for awareness of the other's feelings and consciousness during interpersonal interaction.**

Between five and eleven months, one of the most effective elicitors of infant smiling and laughter is peek-a-boo (Schultz 1976, 30–31).

Infants enjoy interaction not only with caretakers but with other infants.

Watching the little ones in their play, we observe

...smiles, interest in each other and in the other's actions, . . . and actions directed apparently towards the other. . . . The infants seem attracted by perceptual similarities, sensing that the other is like oneself. . . . The other is distinct, yet like oneself, and I suggest that we can infer that the child

becomes more aware of being himself or herself through this similarity and differentiation from the other similar person.” (Pines 1987, 33)

When being held satisfactorily by a caretaker, the wakeful infant begins to look around. He looks mostly at the holder’s face. What does he see?

“Ordinarily, what the baby sees is himself. . . . A mother is looking at the baby and what she looks like is related to what she sees there” (ibid., 25).

The face of the good mother is a mirror. It is thought that adult needs *...for kissing, smiling, and physical caring or lovemaking have their origins in the shared gaze, touch, holding, and vocal “conversations” of infant and mother. The response of each partner to the other is required for a sense of well being. Failures of mirroring in infancy leading to false self problems make it difficult to re-create the mirroring experience in adult sexual life. Without a capacity for mutual mirroring, exchange is severely hampered.* (Scharff 1982, 24)

Infants respond pleurably to the human voice. Mothers quickly learn which tones are most soothing. The very fact that infants spend so much time practicing speech sounds and trying to talk to adults and each other implies that listening to speech and speaking are inherently pleasurable. Conversely, parents find certain tones of voice, such as those of whining, crying, and infant screaming, to be painful. These sounds quickly move them to action. I think some of these tones in themselves induce pain, which, in turn, motivates us to do something about their source. The desire to do something about a crying child is not only in regard to our own children. Many people wish they could do something about an unrelated, whining or screaming child who is in the same restaurant as they! Marvin Minsky suggests that the urgency aroused in us may be due to a connection of the specific arousal mechanism to remnants of the mechanism that ensured we would cry as infants (Minsky 1985, 171). At about four months, the infant begins to pay more attention to objects and events in her physical surroundings. She begins to reach. During this phase, a caretaker is likely to follow the infant’s flow of attention and say something in babytalk about that at which the infant looks. At around ten months, the infant begins to use gesture and vocalization to attract attention or to demand service; she begins to coordinate people and

events. By thirteen months, she coordinates vocalization with pointing. She looks sequentially from her partner in interaction to the object of communication. Soon after, speech emerges (Wood 1989, 63).

Speech does not emerge simply from hearing it. There must be interaction.

A boy with normal hearing but with deaf parents was exposed to television every day so that he would learn English. By age three, he had become fluent in the sign language of his parents and their associates. He neither understood nor spoke English (Muskowitz 1978, 94–94B).

For the infant, hearing the speech of significant others plays an important role in the acquisition of both verbal and nonverbal communication skills.

When a deaf child tries to grasp what others are communicating, the demands on the child's cognitive skills become formidable. The deaf child must try to watch both the speaker and what she is speaking about — the child's attention is divided, and information is lost along the way. Those interacting with the deaf child naturally respond by attempting to direct the child's attention to what the speaker believes is relevant to the communication; this does not work very well and creates new problems. Since deafness is an impediment to the child's communicative competence, it becomes an impediment to intellectual competence (Wood 1989). For all children, an elementary understanding of social interaction is attained somewhat differently than an elementary understanding of physical processes. Persons and animals afford types of interaction nonexistent in the inanimate world.

“Most significantly, there is the ability of persons intentionally to coordinate their actions, thoughts, and perspectives with one another.

Persons do not simply react to one another, but do so consciously, purposefully, with mutual intent. This intentional coordination makes possible forms of communication and reciprocal exchanges unimaginable in the inanimate world.” (Damen 1981, 158)

One might think that social cognition would be more difficult than physical cognition. People, unlike inanimate objects, can move themselves. The movement of everyday inanimate objects is predictable from cognizance of their everyday physical situation; the behavior of people is only loosely predictable from their social circumstances. Yet, as Martin Hoffman has observed, development of social cognition evidently does not lag behind

development of physical cognition. Young children grasp the nature of human action space with or ahead of their grasp of the nature of the inanimate world (Hoffman 1981, 69–71).

Hoffman draws attention to some characteristics of social interaction that may facilitate social cognition. The continuous feedback which people give each other compensates for the complexity of behavior by allowing partners in interaction to easily correct interpretations of their observations. The fact that people, broadly speaking, are built in the same way, physically, cognitively, and emotionally, also facilitates comprehension of the actions and reactions of others (ibid., 72–74).

Another aid to elementary social comprehension is the vicarious, or empathic, arousal of feelings. These avail through involuntary, minimally cognitive mechanisms. As one person looks at another, in a swift, subconsciously directed way, he compares the other's words, facial expressions, body language, and voice quality to his own past experiences and calls forth those which match the other's present expressions. When calling forth memories, he recalls feelings and thereby has a rough sense of what the other is expressing and feeling more quickly than conscious analysis would allow (ibid., 74–80).

Profound effects of empathy and social interaction on human life are illustrated well by the research discussed by James Lynch (1977). A psychologist and researcher on the psychosomatic aspects of man's life, Lynch has compiled an impressive amount of evidence for the existence of a biological need of companionship for health and well-being. He documents evidence of the relationship between grief, loss, and loneliness and sudden death, disease, and heart attacks.

At the University of Oklahoma Medical School, Dr. Stewart Wolf examined 65 patients who had documented myocardial infarctions and 65 matched control subjects who were physically healthy. All 130 of these individuals were interviewed monthly and given a battery of psychological tests to determine their levels of depression and social frustration. Predictions were then made after a series of interviews as to which 10 subjects would most likely have a recurrent heart attack and die — the prediction being based solely on the level of depression and social frustration, without any knowledge of who, in fact, had even had a heart attack. All 10 patients

selected by purely psychological criteria were among the first 23 who died within the four-year period after these predictions were made. (Lynch 1977, 61–62)

Martin Seligman has also garnered clinical evidence about helplessness, grief, loss, and sudden death in humans. He recounts, in addition, numerous examples of experimentally created situations in which animals were helpless to escape shock and pain and the adverse effects on the animals later cognitive abilities and health. For example, wild rats which had been squeezed until they stopped struggling, drowned within 30 minutes of being placed in a water tank from which there was no escape, unlike rats not squeezed, which swam for 60 hours before drowning (Seligman 1975, 59). Upon autopsy, the squeezed rats appeared to have had a heart attack; blood was pooled centrally, congesting the heart. The rats not squeezed appeared to have died of exhaustion (after the 60-hour swim); blood was pooled in extremities.

This phenomenon parallels the heart attacks and sudden death seen in humans experiencing loss, especially sudden loss, of loved ones. Lynch (1977) reports case after case of the death of individuals relatively soon after that of a wife, husband, child, brother, or sister.

Loneliness and lack of companionship can affect health. “Death rate from coronary heart disease for 40-year-old divorced males . . . is 2.5 times greater than for married males of the same age” (Lynch 1977, 87). A patient was in a coma; for medical reasons, every muscle in his body had been completely paralyzed by the drug d-tubocurarine.” In spite of his acute condition, the heart rate change in the comatose man when the nurse comforted him was striking” (ibid., 91). Hospital staff have found that the incidence of a second heart attack is highest when the patient is moved from the intensive care unit to the regular ward — unless the same nurses and doctors follow the patient to the regular ward and continue caring for him.

The emotional lives of men and animals are powerfully influenced by perception. The rat dies from its perception of its helplessness. If a person feels extremely helpless, the presence of others, especially someone he loves and who loves and values him, reassures him in a direct, concrete, perceptual way that his needs will be looked after. Thereby his feelings of

powerlessness and helplessness are relieved. We are built such that the mere verbal reassurance and abstract knowledge that someone cares for us and will look after our interests is not sufficient to completely, subconsciously, emotionally convince us that we are not helpless. The personal presence and tactile contact of another seems essential to make the injured person feel better and — in many cases — to survive.

We are constituted so as to be in tune to the feelings of others and to be very responsive to those feelings. It is our nature to be a social animal.

IV. Sensitivity and Independence

Human intelligence evidently evolved among social animals. The existence of the social group with its network of interaction and feedback seems to have provided the right conditions within which the intelligence of the apes and man might develop (Cheney and Seyfarth 1985; Clementson-Mohr 1982, 63–64, 67). Individual human intelligence certainly develops only with social interaction. Man is born with very little in the way of immediately usable skills and must learn a tremendous amount. The survival value of many of the things humans (and other animals) must learn is not directly experienced by the young, but motivation to learn is essential to development. Positive feedback from adults helps provide motivation for the young to acquire knowledge and practice the skills necessary for adult survival and happiness.

Maria Montessori argued that the mastery of skills in itself was highly pleasurable for children, but she also recognized that the guidance of the child by the adult is essential for the child to learn properly. Her educational system, using the structured environment with directresses instead of teachers, was a means by which to maximize the child's exercise and feeling of independence while guiding his learning.

Man was not born to be Robinson Crusoe. The experience of those in accidental or enforced isolation suggests that social interaction is important for good cognitive functioning during the adult, as well as the infant, period of life. It is a common experience of those in isolation to experience sensory disorientation and to either forget how to speak or to speak to themselves and fantasize extensively about conversations with

others. The eighteenth-century word for those left in isolation a long time was maroon, meaning “to run wild, having reverted to a state of nature” (OED). To this day, maroon implies a kind of wild-eyed, disoriented, or unusually slow-to-comprehend-the-obvious type of person. In *Treasure Island*, such a character is found stranded on the island and is called “a maroon.” Bugs Bunny frequently applies this epithet to those he thinks are not with it.

Humans are not entirely capable of fully independent judgment until adolescence. Their extreme sensitivity to the opinions and judgments of others during adolescence is partly a result of their need to formulate independent abstract judgments about the world, combined with their knowledge that they are not very sure of their reasoning processes. This makes adolescents simultaneously feel the need of approval more urgently than in other periods of life and be more susceptible to perversion of their proper development by means of approval.

Lack of positive feedback or the presence of terrible negative feedback in childhood can not only cause marasmus in infants but, apparently, can cripple a person’s cognitive capabilities in regard to his relationships to other people. We all know about the cases of abused and neglected children who grow up to be criminals or lead lives filled with failure and despondency. But what of those neglected and abused children who grow up to achieve great and unusual triumphs? Unfortunately, they often bear the scars of their early emotional deprivation. Such people often grow up to be unable to think rationally about their relations with others because their need for positive feedback has been so greatly frustrated. The longing for approval, understanding, and love can be felt as superceding all other things.

I remember an extremely intelligent young man, an honor student about to go to graduate school. He had endured an early life of horrid beatings, of legs broken by his father, of physical neglect, institutionalization, and abusive foster care. At seventeen his adoptive family told him they did not want him back after he was discharged from the army, and he was on his own. In the face of all this, he managed not only to provide for his basic necessities but to put himself through college and be at the top of his class. However, he suffered endless bouts of self-doubt, feelings of

worthlessness, and depression. Just at the point in his life at which he had achieved so much, he was rejected by his first love. He committed suicide. I think that however brilliant he was in intellectual matters, his frustrated need for love and approval was so great that he could not reason correctly about the importance of that rejection in terms of his whole life. The rejection took on dimensions of importance that made life seem unbearable and not worth living. His case is far from unique.

Sensitivity to others differs dramatically among people. We vary as much in our natural, temperamental sensitivity to others as we do in every physical respect of our bodies. There are remarkable variations in the structure and functioning of our physical organs and in our biochemistries (Williams 1971, 24–65). These individual differences underlie variations in patterns of breathing and sleep and variations in responses to narcotics (ibid., 144–70). They carry over, also, to physiologically-affected psychological characteristics (ibid., 69–71, 82–85). Individual temperamental differences are more easily seen in other animals because they are not subject to self-conscious control of personality. For example, some individual dogs are very responsive to us, making them more suitable as pets; some are naturally grouchy or indifferent to human interaction.

Human infants are born with distinctively different temperaments (Kagan 1984, 64–70). Some neonates are very aware of people and facial expressions, tones of voice, and gestures while others barely pay attention to others and their feelings at all. (Some autism may be the result of a lack of the normal human ability to recognize and respond to other humans.) Some are placid and easily pleased, some are very active, and some are extremely irritable and cranky.

It is widely thought that women tend to be more sensitive to other people. Girls are culturally encouraged to develop their sensitivity to people. There is another possible factor though. In early childhood, females generally develop more quickly than males; they respond more to voice and develop language more quickly than males. Perceptual abilities that aid communication and interaction with other people are favored in female development; they develop quickly. People tend to do what they do best. Is it so surprising, then, that women so frequently work and excel at activities consisting of interpersonal interaction? — teacher, nurse, psychologist,

counselor, child caretaker, etc. Male infants develop more rapidly in visual-spatial abilities. They apparently tend to overtake females in overall mental ability. I have wondered whether female sensitivity to people lets girls use feedback and learning from others better early in life but then stunts their cognitive growth later by making them too sensitive to the feelings of others.

Rand's fictional character, Howard Roark, is introduced as a young person very, naturally insensitive to the feelings of others. He is not a person who notices others, who pays attention to the presence of others, much less their feelings. "People turned to look at Howard Roark as he passed. . . . Howard Roark saw no one. For him, the streets were empty. He could have walked there naked without concern" (Rand 1943, 10-11). But he is **very sensitive to inanimate visual-spatial relationships**. "He knew that the days ahead would be difficult. . . . He tried to consider it. But he forgot. He was looking at the granite" (ibid.,9). Roark's attention and interest is riveted to the look of the world, to the things of inanimate nature that he can rearrange for building. His architectural greatness and his visual-spatial orientation go hand-in-hand.

Another sympathetic character, Dominique Francon, is quite sensitive to people, to their feelings and reactions. Her independent mind leads her to hide from the world so as not to have to experience the pain of feedback from others. She, too, is sensitive to the visual-spatial but most especially to what the visual-spatial creations of men express about them. Roark tends to react to the look of things directly, to the landscape and how he can make it look. Dominique is obsessed with the man behind the work and the greatness — or puniness — it implies.

I think it is unfortunate that so many readers try to exactly emulate Roark's natural emotional state in regard to other people, to imitate his temperamental proclivities. For many readers of *The Fountainhead*, Roark serves as a model for character building and personality change. However, it is sometimes difficult to separate what is essentially good and universally necessary for good character and happiness from those aspects of Roark's personality which are individual characteristics. Some aspects of his personality are not necessarily tied to what makes him a morally great person but perhaps to what makes him a great dramatic character. Rand

made him naturally, dispositionally unaware of others in order to dramatize his nature and his conflict with others. The premier antagonist, Ellsworth Toohey, asks of Roark:

"Why don't you tell me what you think of me? . . . No one will hear us."

Roark replies, "But I don't think of you" (ibid., 413).

Fine drama.

An important part of Roark's development in the novel is his learning to understand other people, their characters and motivations. A large part of Dominique's development consists in her realization that men do not have to be horrible. In the beginning, she is revolted by those around her. In part because of her natural social sensitivity, she feels personally violated by the feelings, wants, and demands of the shabby people surrounding her. She cultivates indifference and coldness. Dominique is saved not by intellectual independence nor by the suppression of feeling but by her discovery that Howard Roark is possible.

The contrast between Dominique's and Roark's personalities illustrates an important psychological and ethical distinction. In evaluating oneself and others, one must be aware of natural individual levels of sensitivity to others and not confuse it with lack of independence in judgment. One should not presume that any concern for the feelings and thoughts of others or any desire to be liked by others must spring from lack of independence, debased motives, weakness of character, or "social metaphysics."

Branden defined social metaphysics as "the psychological syndrome that characterizes a person who holds the minds of other men, not objective reality, as his ultimate psycho-epistemological frame of reference" (Branden 1969, 167). He argued that social metaphysics arises when a person has not adequately developed his rational faculty but feels that he must depend on the judgment of someone. While I think his account is essentially correct, I want to emphasize the role of our animal need of positive feedback in the development of social metaphysics. Human development is such a long, complex, and arduous task that there are many opportunities for our animal need of positive feedback to distort cognitive development. Our animal need of approval certainly comes first in our lives, before the development of reason or even rudimentary

concepts, so, in a way, it is not surprising that it can get us off-course in our struggle for independent judgment.

One must not let sensitivity to others cloud or sway judgment. One must not repress sensitivity altogether; a basic need would be unfulfilled; frustration would follow. One needs to learn how to be aware of the facts, all the facts, including the facts of one's emotional life. We need to recognize our need for positive feedback from others and cultivate its proper fulfillment, pursuing good relationships with those genuinely deserving of our love and admiration.

It is right to enjoy interacting pleasantly with the cashier at the grocery store if she is treating one well. It is right to want to be friendly. It is right to enjoy the love of our natural families, even if they do not share many of our philosophical values but do have other significant values in common with us.

Our natural biological families, in some ways, can offer very good feedback because they are biologically, perceptually, emotionally, temperamentally like us. By the same token, strife with them can be particularly painful, sometimes devastating.

Desiring the positive regard and positive reactions of others is a part of our rational and our animal nature. We should channel and integrate those desires for our own highest happiness.

Bibliography:

<http://mol.redbarn.org/objectivism/Writing/MarshaEnright/WhyManNeedsApproval.html>