ABSTRACT. When purged of its connection to libertarian forms of capitalism, Ayn Rand's ethical "egoism" is not an implausible ethical theory. I argue (1) that Rand in fact fails to show the connection between her ethics and the political economy she has championed and (2) that in fact her ethics is at least as compatible with socialism as with capitalism.

The ethical theory of Ayn Rand has received only scant attention from the philosophical community. I think there are two reasons for this. The first, of course, is that Rand was not a "professional" philosopher. Her works do not appear in the standard philosophical forums and as a consequence are simply not widely known among professional philosophers. She tends to eschew professional jargon and refuses to give the proper degree of respect to some of the well-established dogmas of the profession. If this in part accounts for the lack of interest in her work we can perhaps agree that it represents more of a problem for the professionals than it does for Rand. It is, in any case beyond anyone's power to change. The other reason, and I suspect it may be a more important one, is that Rand is widely known as a vigorous defender of capitalism, indeed of a "pure" form of it championed by libertarian thinkers, and it is common knowledge that capitalism as a political and economic philosophy has for some time been in disfavor among many intellectuals, including many philosophers. It would come as no surprise if the "invisibility" of Rand's ethical theory in this community is to a large extent the result of her association with an economic and political philosophy which remains not merely in the minority among philosophers but is in fact actively disliked by many.

If this is the case then the philosophical community is making a serious mistake. For despite Rand's efforts to connect her ethics to her political philosophy it is my contention that the two are independent. Her ethical theory may well be true: indeed I think it is more correct than any existing competitor. But her "political-economy" may well be false, as I believe it to be, without any contradiction within her system. This is because she is mistaken in thinking that the political-economy follows from the ethical theory. Indeed, odd as it may seem to devotees of Rand, her ethical theory may give at least as much support to a socialist economic theory as it does to a capitalist one.

To support that claim I want in this paper to examine Rand's attempt to derive capitalism from her ethical system. The best argument to
that effect is found in the essay "Man's Rights" in *The Virtue of Selfishness* (and reprinted in *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*):

The right to life is the source of all rights—and the right to property is their only implementation. Without property rights, no other rights are possible. Since man has to sustain his life by his own effort, the man who has no right to the product of his effort has no means to sustain his life. The man who produces while others dispose of his product, is a slave.³

It is not necessary to set out her entire ethical system in order to understand this argument, and the parts which are essential for this understanding will be spelled out below; but it is crucial to set forth at least one of the essential features of capitalism in order to see how this argument can help establish its necessity. The essential feature of capitalism for this context is that the means of production, including human labor power, is privately owned. By private ownership I mean that the disposition of these items is (subject to certain laws) at the discretion of an individual or some (relatively small) group of individuals acting only for themselves and motivated only by those values by which they choose to act. They may act wisely or foolishly, impulsively or thoughtfully, selfishly or benevolently, but they act in their own name and are answerable to no one. It is necessary to be explicit about this latter point because even in those societies where capitalism is not the prevailing economic system individuals frequently dispose of the means of production. But when they do they do so in the name of the people or the proletariat or the working class or the Party, and are ultimately (if only theoretically) responsible to them. Not so in capitalism. If a manager (who does not own the means of production) disposes of it in a certain way, he is ultimately responsible to those who do own it (and those who do own it are a small subset of the entire population).

This is by no means a sufficient condition for the existence of capitalism, though it is a necessary one. To list all of the sufficient conditions might be difficult: one would need to postulate a market system as well, plus, perhaps, insist that most transactions be engaged in for the sake of profit. (It is theoretically possible, within a market system and a private ownership system, to engage in transactions for values other than financial profit—love, charity, religious devotion, etc.—but is not clear that, if most transactions take those forms, we would still have capitalism.)

By showing that individuals have the right to private property, Rand goes a long way toward establishing the necessity of capitalism, for while we have noted that private property is not, in itself, sufficient for capitalism, the only real, viable alternative to capitalism, socialism, lacks this feature. So if Rand succeeds in establishing it as morally necessary, she has at least rendered the only viable alternative to capitalism unacceptable.

A look at the argument shows that it has a deceptively simple structure. A reconstructed version might look like this:

**Premise I:** Man has to sustain his life by his own effort.
This claim is developed (although not in precisely these words) in the ethical theory. The point is that man has no instincts which assure him of survival. His efforts must include rational thought and behavior (both of which are characteristic of his nature) as well as productive work, for while it might be possible for one or a few individuals to exist parasitically, such parasitism cannot be the pervasive mode of survival. There are no gods to take care of us, so the parasite’s life depends upon the efforts of some non-parasites. Now it may be argued that insofar as at least some men can be parasitical we are required to restate the first premise as follows:

Premise 1*: At least some men have to sustain their lives by their own efforts.

But Rand’s likely reply here is that it is man qua man that she is talking about, not merely a creature physically resembling a man. Of course this claim is a moral as well as a metaphysical claim, but since I am willing to grant Rand her ethical theory for the sake of argument I do not wish to challenge this claim now. Below, the same objection will arise in another context, and later still I will suggest a way of interpreting Premise 1 which avoids this difficulty. For now, let us return to the reconstruction:

Premise 2: If man must sustain his life by his own effort then he must have the right to the product of his own effort.

The reasons here have to be interpolated but are not hard to find. The point of engaging in life-sustaining effort is not merely that effort is life-sustaining but that the product of that effort is. Now it may well be the case that some effort, in itself, is necessary to sustain life. Indeed psychologists point out the debilitating effects of a life in which productive activity has ceased (because of disability or retirement, for instance). Moreover, Rand sometimes writes as if rational, productive activity is a mark of human life which distinguishes it from mere hominid existence. But none of that is to the point here, for however true it may be that the activity of work is essential for human well-being or human existence, the argument here concerns the product of that effort, and that product includes those mundanely essential life-sustaining elements such as food, clothing, shelter, medicine, etc. It may also be argued that human beings, not living by bread alone, require art, music, literature, even philosophy, to “recreate” them in their productive life, so that these products of human effort should also count as life-sustaining.

It is immediately possible to anticipate a potential objection. The argument, so one might object, proves only that man must have a right to some of the product of his own effort: specifically to that product which sustains his life, the consumables, the aforementioned food, clothing, shelter, medicine, and perhaps, recreation, which are part of the social and biological reproductive cycle of any given individual. What is, significantly, not included in this list, however, is precisely what is necessary for any full-blooded capitalism: the means of production. We must admit that the means of production are products of human labor: factories are built, for instance, mines are dug, farms are cleared. But no one consumes a factory, a mine, a mill, a farm, and no one needs to consume them in order to live. Rand’s argument justifies the private ownership only of those things essential for life, and the means of pro-
duction are not among them. Even the most illiberal communist societies
today permit private ownership of consumables, distinguishing them from
official "state property". The crucial issue concerns means of produc-
tion, and Rand's argument bypasses those entirely.

This objection is not telling because its crucial assumption is
false: the assumption that the means of production are not consumed in
the process of sustaining an individual's life in the same way as is the
food he eats or the clothing he wears. Clearly the means of production
are "used up" in the process of production, and in that sense are con-
sumed. Moreover, if we view the human reproductive process in its his-
torical and cyclical dimensions we see that that "using up" takes place
within the context of life-sustaining activity, just as eating and wearing
clothes does. In order to live a man must eat; in order to eat, he must
produce his food; in order to produce his food he must produce his
tools; in order to produce his tools he must live. And so on. In other
words the consumption of tools is as much a part of the process of life
sustaining activity as is the eating of food and the expenditure of ef-
fort. If a farmer's plow is taken from him he cannot sustain his life; if a
carpenter's hammer is appropriated he is similarly handicapped. The
"means of production" are tools on a grand scale, but they are no less
tools, and the man who has no right to this product of his labor has no
means to sustain his life, just as the man who has no right to the food
he produces has no means to sustain his life.

Still, there is something structurally odd, if not substantively odd
about this premise. Consider a parallel case:

Premise X: If man must satisfy his sexual appetite through
sexual relationships, then man has the right to
sexual partners.

Clearly there are few who would grant to man such a "right". To under-
stand why Premise 2 is acceptable to Rand while Premise X is not re-
quires that we turn to her ethical theory. In doing so we will see just
how Rand uses that ethical theory in the derivation of her political-
economy.

A possible reason for rejecting Premise X but not premise 2 is
that 2, unlike X, has the force of justice behind it. Justice demands that
man have the right to the product of his labor, but not that he have
the right to a sexual partner. But, in the first place, if this were the
reason for that right, then the antecedent of Premise 2 would be unnec-
essary. That is, the fact that man must sustain his life by his own ef-
fort would be irrelevant to his right to the product of that effort, and
Rand's statement to that effect would be gratuitous or superfluous. In
the second place, it is clear both from the quoted paragraph and from
an examination of her ethical theory that justice is not the central moral
notion either in her ethics or in this context. While she does think that
capitalism is the only economic system consistent with justice, her cen-
tral ethical notion is human life, which, for her, is both the standard of
value and the highest value. So that while the "need" for a sexual
partner can be defeated by the right of any potential partner to refuse,
the right to life is not defeated by any other so-called right. As she
says, "the right to life is the source of all rights", from which, presum-
ably she intends it to follow that it is an indefeasible right.
Again, though, an objection might be raised by a consideration of the following hypothetical case: imagine that we lived in a Hobbesian world, where, in fact, human life is best maintained by brutality, even including murder. Would, under those conditions, Rand accept this premise:

**Premise Y:** If man must sustain his life through murder, then man must have the right to the unprovoked use of deadly force?

Rand is quite explicit about rejecting such premises. One might suppose that her main objection would be that the use of "deadly force" is a violation of the basic right to life, and of course this is one objection. But she also rejects premises of this sort:

**Premise Z:** If man must maintain his life through fraud, then man must have the right to lie, cheat, and steal.

(To be completely fair to Rand we have to make it clear that she would never agree that the antecedent of this conditional or of Premise Y is true or even could be true. The hypothetical case is described merely to bring out the essence of her ethical position.) The objection here cannot be that a right to life is violated. Indeed the hypothesized situation is one in which life is purchased at the expense of, supposedly, lesser values. Rather, Rand's objection is of a very different sort. Her position is that it is not mere biological existence which is a value for human beings; instead it is human life, life of an essentially human kind, which is valuable. She understands by this life which is rational and productive, for rationality and productivity are the essential elements of human nature. Brutishness, parasitism, fraudulence, etc., are essentially non-human characteristics, and a life characterized by these things is not essentially a human life. So Premise Z is essentially self-contradictory. A man's life cannot be maintained by his acting in a non-human way.

It is easy for the philosopher to spot danger in a position of this kind. If one is going to derive moral principles from the nature of man (whether that nature is derived from metaphysical speculation or from empirical social scientific study of human beings, or from something else) one has to be very careful not to gratuitously endow human nature with pre-conceived moral characteristics from which the desired moral conclusions will follow by definition. One needs, in other words, independent reasons for ascribing those characteristics as part of the human essence: there must be non-moral reasons for insisting, for instance, that brutishness, etc., are inconsistent with human nature. For the sake of discussion I will assume that Rand provides such reasons. This is the same problem we encountered in the discussion of Premise 1, and I will deal with it once and for all below when I propose an interpretation of these premises which Rand herself would probably not countenance.

Premise 2, then, is an essentially ethical premise, and is grounded in Rand's metaphysical theories about the nature of man as well as, more directly, in her ethical theory itself. This is as it should be, for from the two premises (the first being an "anthropological" one) a clearly moral conclusion follows:
C: Man must have the right to the product of his own effort.

Since we have already argued that the product includes the means of production, it appears that Rand has established her conclusion, the right to private ownership of the means of production, and with it established an essential element in the justification of capitalism.

But of course she has not done this, and it is not difficult to see why not if we focus on the systematic ambiguity of the word "man" as she uses it in her argument.

It is clear that in her conclusion Rand intends that "man" be synonymous with "individuals". In order for her argument to be a defense of capitalism she has to show that it is individuals who must have the right to property, and hence individuals who must have the right to the product of their own labor. In that case the word "man" must refer to individuals throughout the argument, including, of course, the first premise. But it is obvious that in Premise 1 the only interpretation of "man" which renders the statement plausible is the collective interpretation: "all men" or "man, collectively" or "all working men" or, if one is so inclined, "the working class". For only if we understand the premise in this way is it sensible to suppose that man must provide for his own existence through his own effort. No individual does, nor, in the modern world, do any small groups. Indeed it is probably no exaggeration to say that human survival is guaranteed only by the collective activities of all rational and productive agents. If this is the case then the argument suffers from the fallacy of equivocation.

But of course Rand is not equivocating: she means us to understand "man" as "individuals" in Premise 1, just as we are meant to understand it in the conclusion. Unfortunately this simply renders the first premise false. Moreover it is easy to see what happens if we interpret "man" in such a way as to make the first premise true—that is, collectively. By maintaining that interpretation consistently throughout the argument we are led to the decidedly un-Randian conclusion:

C': Mankind (collectively) has the right to the product of its (collective) labor,

which is a way of asserting a collectivist theory of property, something not at all consistent with capitalism, but obviously consistent with socialism.

Rand is not entirely oblivious to this kind of objection. In her essay "What is Capitalism" she asserts:

It is morally obscene to regard wealth as an anonymous tribal product and to talk about "redistributing" it. The view that wealth is the result of some undifferentiated, collective process, that we all did something and it's impossible to tell who did what, therefore some sort of egalitarian "distribution" is necessary—might have been appropriate in a primordial jungle with a savage horde moving boulders by crude physical labor (though even there someone had to initiate and organize the moving). To hold that view in an industrial society—where individual achievements are a matter of pub-
lic record—is so crass an evasion that even to give it the benefit of a doubt is an obscenity.\(^6\)

This paragraph makes it clear that Rand is unusually disturbed by this kind of objection, but her concern here is primarily with distribution of the product of labor, and she is eager to reject any "egalitarian" distribution schemes. While that issue is somewhat peripheral to the focus of this paper,\(^9\) it is worth noting that the "collectivist" theory of property implicit in conclusion C' does not give any guidance for the distribution of property. Specifically it does not follow from the claim that mankind, collectively, has the right to the collective product of its labor that each individual has an equal right to any or all of that product. To argue in that way would be to commit the fallacy of division. So Rand's disgust with egalitarian systems need not, require a rejection of a collectivist theory of production, despite her apparent belief to the contrary.

If we look at her argument itself we see that the key claim is that it is possible to differentiate the various contributions of different participants in the productive process, and as a consequence to apportion to each an appropriate share of the whole. Moreover there is more than a hint that Rand thinks that "mental labor" is more important to the productive process than is "physical labor" and that as a consequence is worthy of a larger portion of that product.\(^11\)

Whatever we may think of these claims in and of themselves it is necessary for us to ask whether or not they are consistent with her overall ethical and metaphysical position. They do not seem to be, for however important one sort of labor may be (or however much of it there may be) and however unimportant another sort may be, no sort by itself provides for the laborer's existence. The inventor, important as he may be, cannot contribute one iota to his or anyone else's existence without (among others) machinists to materialize his ideas. And, conversely, no purely physical labor can be productive unless it is guided by thought. Thus the issue of "importance" is beside the point. Neither kind of labor is sufficient, and both are necessary, for providing for human existence. Thus collective labor is required, and the conclusion Rand must reach is C', the collectivist theory, and not C.

Is there any other strategy open to Rand which would allow her to avoid either the charge of equivocation or, what might be even more outrageous to Rand, the claim that she has unwittingly offered a defense of socialism? A possible approach is suggested in her essay "What is Capitalism". There she offers arguments similar to the one discussed above (and she refers readers to that one for more details) but, perhaps significantly, she no longer writes about man "providing for" his own existence but "supporting" his own existence. It is not possible to know whether this change was in response to external criticisms of the sort mentioned here, to further reflection on her own about this kind of problem, or of no substantive significance to her. But on the assumption that it was indeed a deliberate change, is it a change that helps?

While "provide for" is relatively clear, "support" is notably ambiguous. In one meaning it might simply be a synonym for "provide for"; if that is all she intended—a stylistic change—then of course it is no help. In another sense, it might be taken to suggest that a person contributes to his own existence through his own labor; that while he
does not himself create all that he needs he at least makes a contribu-
tion to the total. The man who produces 10,000 shoe soles a day has not
provided for his own life by means of his labor or his product but has
supported it because to some extent shoe soles are necessary for human
existence.

If this is what she had in mind, then again her argument fails. For in
this case no reason can be advanced for accepting Premise 2. If
a man must contribute to his own existence through the production of
some part of what he needs, then it hardly follows that he has no means
to life if he doesn't own the product of his effort. Indeed the product
of his effort--10,000 shoe soles for instance--would be of only the most
minimal use to him in sustaining his life. (His only hope would be to ex-
change the soles for other things, but this approach, when taken to its
logical conclusion, involves yet another interpretation of "support", to
be considered in the next paragraph.) Moreover, in almost any case we
could name, the availability of substitute products renders his product
not even necessary. In short, in this example as well as in most others
we could offer, there is virtually no connection at all between the means
to life and the product of any individual's labor.

The most plausible interpretation of "support" in this context is
the "common-sense" one--a person works to "support" himself and his
family, which means roughly that he works to earn "a living". Perhaps
this is what Rand meant when she distinguished between earning and
producing:

Bear in mind that the right to property is a right to action,
like all the others: it is not the right to an object, but to
the action and the consequences of producing or earning
that object. It is not a guarantee that a man will earn any
property, but only a guarantee that he will own it if he
earns it. It is the right to gain, to keep, to use and to dis-
pose of material values.12

In this case, however, an extraordinary wedge has been driven between
the labor or "effort" and its "product". No one, or almost no one in the
productive system which gives rise to this idiom has property rights to
the literal product of his or her labor: the physical or intellectual
"stuff" that is created. All that one has the right to is a "fair wage" or
a "fair return" for one's labor. One certainly does not have the right to
take possession, use, or dispose of the physical or intellectual product
of one's labor; indeed if a modern worker were to attempt to take such
possession, either as an individual or in concert with fellow workers, he
would probably be charged with theft, pilfering, embezzlement, violation
of patent or copyright laws, or some similarly appropriate offense.

Our problem is not, as one might expect, to define a fair wage or
a fair return. Rather it is even more basic than that. We must discover
what the relationship is, first, between the literal product of one's labor
and one's actual remuneration, and second, between the remuneration
and the means of "supporting life". If we can find answers to these
problems consistent with Rand's values then perhaps we will have saved
Rand's derivation of capitalism. But as even the economically unsophisti-
cated will recognize, these are two of the classical questions of economic
theory, and, unfortunately, it is not possible to answer these questions
without presupposing the legitimacy of one or another economic system.
If we assume for instance that (in Hobbes' words) "the worth of a man is his price" we assume that price is determined by a market economy, with all that entails, including the existence of private ownership of the means of production. This is perfectly clear from Paul Samuelson's discussion of wage differentials:

The market will tend towards that equilibrium pattern of wage differentials at which the total demand for each category of labor exactly matches its competitive supply.\(^{13}\)

In other words, wage differentials are the result of supply and demand considerations (as opposed, say, to centralized directives), which considerations already presuppose the institutions of private property, and as a consequence, the antecedent legitimacy of wage differentials cannot be assumed by Rand in an effort to define the "earned" product of an individual's labor. It is legitimate for Samuelson to do this, of course, since his enterprise is not the moral justification of capitalism: he can simply assume it to be legitimate or not raise the question. Rand, however, has more difficult goals in mind, and her task is, consequently, more difficult.

This is not an error unique to supporters of capitalism. When a Marxist (ignoring Marx) insists that workers at a particular factory or in a particular industry are entitled to all of the revenues (to say "profits" would be to give the case away) generated by their labor, including what is now used for reinvestment, for profit, etc., they are unwittingly accepting an account of the value of their labor and its product determined within and by capitalist institutions of valuation. By itself such a demand is incoherent if not contradictory. It makes sense only within a theory of value which provides alternative accounts of the value of labor.

To reiterate, then, this approach, while potentially useful for understanding the workings of capitalist wage systems cannot serve Rand's explicit purpose of legitimating the capitalist wage (and private property) system.

To be sure this is not the end of the larger debate. Proponents of capitalism, including (occasionally) Rand, can argue that only the private ownership of the means of production can assure a level of production high enough, an atmosphere of individual freedom rich enough, to maximize the possibility for individual life. They can point to gross inefficiencies in socialist forms of production, to the stifling of creativity in some socialist countries, to chronic shortages, etc. Proponents of socialism can argue that only social ownership of the means of production can assure the production of life-sustaining (rather than wasteful or harmful) products, and guarantee their distribution in such a way as to maximize human well-being. They can point to periodic depressions under capitalism and to the waste of human potential brought about by poverty. And of course each side has its rejoinders. But these arguments are not pertinent here, however important they may be in the world at large, because they do not make use of Rand's claim that the man who does not own the product of his effort has no means to his own survival. They are arguments at the larger social level about the utility of systems for the well-being of populations. They are not arguments predicated on the nature or essence of the individual, as Rand's arguments purport to be.
The conclusion that I have insisted Rand must accept—the collectivist conclusion—would have been, we can be sure, anathema to Rand. But should it have been? To the Rand who developed the "objectivist ethics" the answer is that it should not have been. It might be supposed that, details aside, Rand's insistence upon egoism—"the virtue of selfishness"—is clearly incompatible with collectivism of any sort, and is spiritually more at home with capitalism. Perhaps; but even there we have to recognize that Rand's egoism is a very peculiar sort. Not only did she insist that it is rational self-interest which ought to prevail (most egoisms demand that), but she also asserted (1) that rational self-interests can be objectively determined on the basis of our nature as human beings (and are not merely matters of the economists' "subjective preferences", no matter how farsighted those might be) and, most importantly (2) that rational self-interests never really conflict. This second condition of her egoism clearly has collectivist implications consistent in spirit with the concept of consensus found among certain anarchistic or quasi-religious groups. So while we can be certain that Rand's commitment was unambiguously to capitalism, it is by no means certain that even the egoistic elements of her ethical theory demand allegiance to it. If Rand's commitment to objectivist ethics is sincerely founded upon the arguments she presents in her essay "The Objectivist Ethics" then the considerations offered here present us with a means of strengthening those arguments and that ethical theory but in the context of a radically different political–economy. This is what I will try to illustrate in the rest of this paper.

We have already seen that Rand has to come to grips with the charge that she can derive her ethics from her metaphysics only by the blatantly ad hoc expedient of rejecting as not "truly human" any of the characteristics she knows to be morally outrageous. Thus, Robert Nozick asks "... if one is in a position to survive as a parasite, what reasons have been offered against it?" And he concludes (1) that Rand has not offered any and (2) that there are none available within the extant philosophical tradition. The problem he points to is that it is indeed possible for some men to be parasites, if not forever then at least indefinitely (until the supply of hosts runs out). Den Uyl and Rasmussen reject this possibility on the ground that it is not life as a human being that would be lived under such circumstances, but this is not an adequate reply in the current context, for it is the ground for such a claim that is at issue here.

One solution, and to my mind the best possible one, is to interpret Rand's claims about human nature as applying to mankind acting together—collectively if you will. Then, of course, it will not be pertinent to ask Nozick's question: it is not possible for mankind as a whole to live parasitically. Some species may, by biological nature, be parasites, but man is just not one of them. Human existence (as a whole) simpliciter, not just human life qua human requires rational thought and productive labor, requires free and informed interaction among individuals and groups, requires that fraud, force, theft, etc., be prevented.

Now if the nature of a thing is to be found in what is required of it for its very existence, as Rand thinks and as seems to be as reasonable a first approximation as any for an empirical account of an essence, then indeed Rand has correctly identified the nature or essence of man. But note that the "thing" whose essence she has found is not any indi-
vidual man—we have seen that individuals need not behave in this way while living quite comfortably (Rand notes and deplores this fact)—but man as a species. Consequently, the moral conclusions she draws about "man" apply to the species as a whole.

To be sure there may be something vaguely mysterious to some about talking about what is required of man as a species rather than what is required of man as an individual. But this is no more strange than is warranted by the facts of the case: the human situation does not require that each and every man be rational and productive, or even that any particular man be; all it requires is that rationality and productivity be a characteristic of human behavior on a large enough scale to overcome the succession of environmental challenges we must always face. Of course we know of no way for this to happen unless individuals in large enough numbers think rationally and act productively. While it is "logically possible" for the whole to have characteristics not shared in by any of its parts this possibility does not seem to be actualized in the case here at issue. Science fiction may portray "societies" in which mindless slaves or robots are so coordinated as to act to produce apparently rational and productive results on the whole. Happily this is still science fiction, and the most rational and productive societies are characterized by the most rational and productive individuals. Rand's original ethical position certainly follows "for the most part" from the variation of it presented here; but it does not follow apodictically, and short of the ad hoc circularity discussed above, it cannot be made to do so.

ENDNOTES


2 This suspicion is supported mainly by anecdotal evidence.

3 Ayn Rand, "Man's Rights", in The Virtue of Selfishness (New York: Signet, 1964), 94. Rand consistently uses the word "man" rather than "people" or other gender-neutral substitutes. It is ironic that at least one of the major problems in her reasoning would have been easier to avoid had she sought gender-neutral terms. However, since that is one of the problems on which I intend to focus attention I will adopt her practice.

4 Ayn Rand, "The Objectivist Ethics", in The Virtue of Selfishness, Ibid., 13-35.

5 Ibid., 24.

6 George Mavrodes challenges Rand's conception of property rights by arguing that "natural" property, like trees or land, cannot be considered the "product" of human labor. But this appears to overlook the
point that farms are not farms (and mines are not mines) until someone
does something to make them farms (or mines). See George I. Mavrodes,

7 Ibid., 25.

8 Ibid., 23, 24.

9 Ayn Rand, "What is Capitalism", in Capitalism, The Unknown Ideal

10 For a discussion of distribution within a collectivist theory of
production see my essay "Some Reflections on the Concept of Poverty",

11 That she does think that is clear from her novels.

12 "Man's Rights", Ibid., 94. Oddly, Tibor Machan interprets Rand's
disclaimer here (to the effect that the right to property is not the right
to an object) literally, when in the context it is clear that what she
means is that the right to property cannot be interpreted as the right
to an object without have earned or produced it. See "Rand and Nozick
on Property Rights", Personalist, 58, 192-95.

13 Paul A. Samuelson, Economics (Eleventh Edition), (New York: Mc


15 Douglas Den Uyl and Douglas Rasmussen, "Nozick on the Randian

16 As an anonymous referee points out, however, one might find in
Rand a moral argument against parasitism on the grounds that it would
be self-defeating to universalize parasitism as a moral principle. While I
don't think this is Rand's argument, it is not clear exactly what "self"
would be defeated in any case. No individual self would be defeated if
that individual were part of a productive society, nor would society be
defeated if only some individuals were parasitical. Society would be de-
feated if people were parasitical to the point where rational, productive
activity no longer characterized it, but that is because such activity is
what is necessary for our life as a species, and hence is characteristic
of our species' nature.