Ayn Rand is well known for advocating egoism, but the substance of that egoism’s instruction is rarely understood. Far from representing the rejection of morality, selfishness, in Rand’s view, actually demands the practice of a systematic code of ethics. This book explains the fundamental virtues that Rand considers vital for a person to achieve his objective well-being: rationality, honesty, independence, justice, integrity, productiveness, and pride. Tracing Rand’s account of the naturalistic ground of value and the harmony of human beings’ rational interests, Tara Smith examines what each of these virtues consists in, why it is a virtue, and what it demands of a person in practice. Along the way, she addresses the status of several conventional virtues within Rand’s theory, considering traits such as kindness, charity, generosity, temperance, courage, forgiveness, and humility. *Ayn Rand’s Normative Ethics* thus offers an in-depth exploration of several specific virtues and an illuminating integration of these with the broader theory of egoism.

Tara Smith is professor of philosophy at the University of Texas, Austin. She is the author of *Moral Rights and Political Freedom* and *Viable Values: A Study of Life as the Root and Reward of Morality*, and she has contributed to the *Journal of Philosophy*, *American Philosophical Quarterly*, *Social Philosophy and Policy*, and *Law and Philosophy*. 
Ayn Rand’s Normative Ethics

The Virtuous Egoist

TARA SMITH

University of Texas
To the memory of my father, Gerald, who quietly taught me so much.
Contents

Acknowledgments ix

1. Introduction 1

2. Rational Egoism: A Profile of Its Foundations and Basic Character 19

3. The Master Virtue: Rationality 48

4. Honesty 75

5. Independence 106

6. Justice 135

7. Integrity 176

8. Productiveness 198

9. Pride 221

10. Implications for Certain Conventional Virtues: Charity, Generosity, Kindness, Temperance 247

Conclusion 284

Appendix: Egoistic Friendship 287

Select List of Works Consulted 305

Index 311
Acknowledgments

I wish to express my gratitude for the many forms of assistance I have received on this project. A fellowship from the Anthem Foundation for the Study of Objectivism and a grant from the Charles Sures Memorial Scholarship Fund of the Ayn Rand Institute have both greatly facilitated my work on this book. The University of Texas has, on several occasions, granted my requests for reduced teaching loads to enable me to make the best use of those funds. Jeff Britting helpfully steered me to materials in the Archives at the Ayn Rand Institute. My research assistants (serially: Allison Weinstein, Amy McLaughlin, Justin Tiehen, and Sherilyn Villareal) have been unfailingly diligent, allowing me the luxury of assurance that whatever I asked them to do would be done well. Marc Baer has compiled the Index.

While I was writing a first, very rough draft of the book, I met weekly with a group of graduate students – John Elia, Tom Miles, Warren von Eschenbach, and Allison Weinstein – who raised all manner of questions, objections, and alternative perspectives on my proposals (just as I had hoped – and feared). The workout they gave my initial formulations proved extremely constructive. Onkar Ghate, Robert Mayhew, Amy Peikoff, Leonard Peikoff, and Greg Salmieri all participated in a workshop on a draft of the chapter on independence; their extensive feedback greatly improved that chapter. Audiences at Bowling Green State University, the University of Colorado, and the University of Georgia offered helpful reactions to material on friendship, which is treated in the Appendix.

My understanding of the issues examined in this book has benefited, over the years, from discussions with more individuals than I can list.
here. Although those conversations varied a great deal in terms of their context, their frequency, their depth, and their breadth or narrowness of focus, I have gained important insights from numerous friends and colleagues – to each of whom I am sincerely grateful. I particularly wish to thank Leonard Peikoff, who, as I set to work on this book, issued an open invitation for me to raise with him whatever particular questions I encountered. On the occasions when I did so, he readily probed the issue with me at whatever length was necessary to fully clarify it. I am also extremely grateful to Allan Gotthelf who, while visiting at UT in the fall of 2002, conversed with me about several of the issues I discuss in the book. Moreover, near its completion, Allan Gotthelf and Robert Mayhew each read the entire manuscript and offered extensive comments, which have significantly strengthened the final product.

Finally, I thank Beatrice Rehl at Cambridge University Press for her support on this project, as well as the staff at the Press for their work in seeing it through to the printed page.