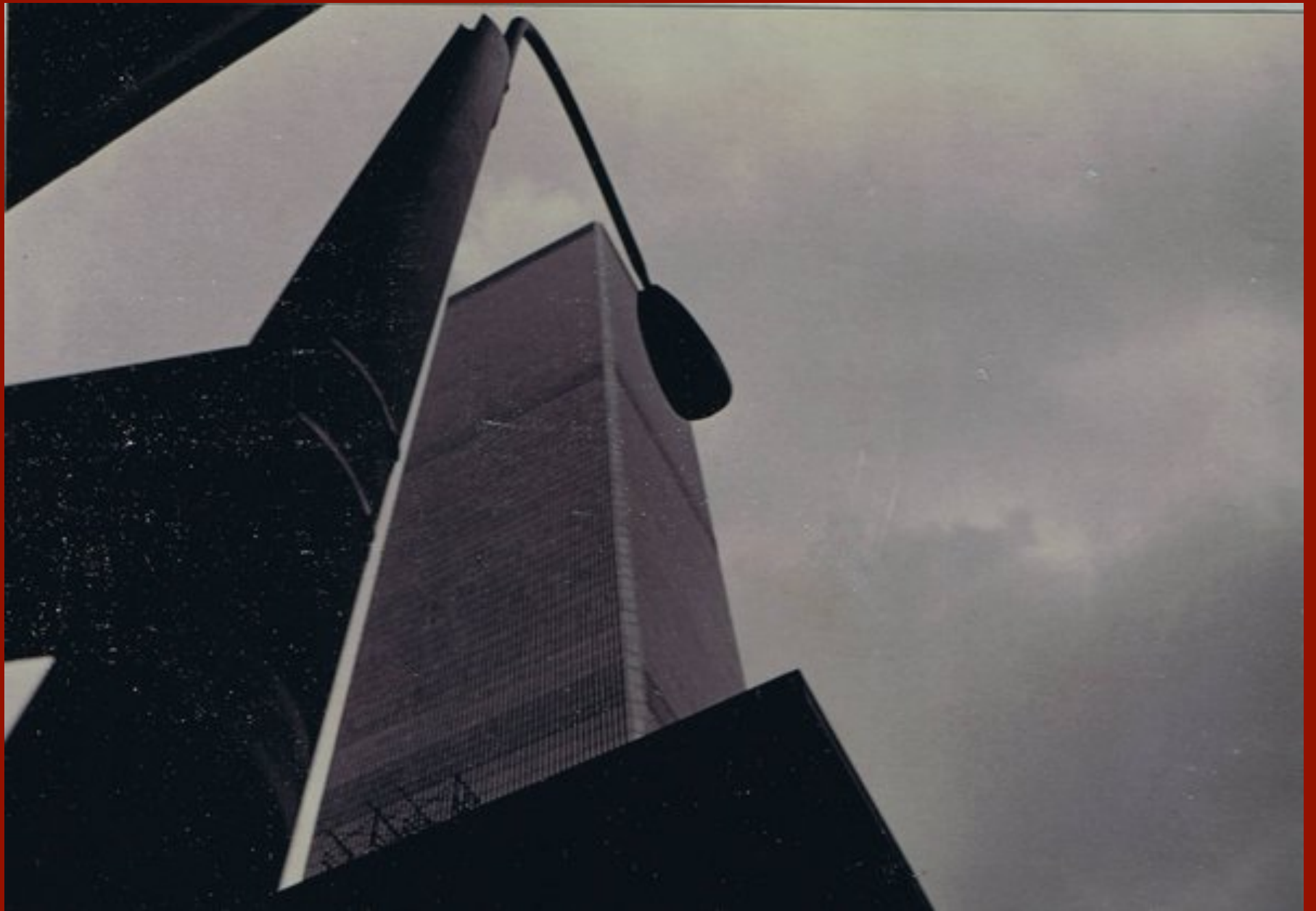


The Cultivation of Character

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The Question

Why did Tony act so rationally to protect his life and health in those desperate circumstances, while others did not?

My Answer, in Brief

- Tony's actions were freely chosen: he could have done otherwise.
- Yet Tony's actions reflected his cultivated moral character: to act rationally to preserve his life despite his fears was “second nature” to him.

Three Questions

- What is moral character?
- How is a person's character formed by his choices?
- How does a person's character affect his thoughts, feelings, and actions?

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What is moral character?

- What are some examples of people with strong moral character, good or bad?
- What moral qualities do those people have?



What is moral character?

- What is general kind of thing is moral character?
- What are some related contrasts to moral character?
- What are the distinctive qualities of moral character?

My Rough Definition

- Character is the integrated sum of deeply-held, automatized principles and value-judgments that shape a person's thoughts, feelings, and actions.
- Moral character is a person's character, as pertains to his moral principles and value-judgments.

Three Questions

- What is moral character?
- How is a person's character formed by his choices?
- How does a person's character affect his thoughts, feelings, and actions?

How is character formed?

- Let's bypass deterministic explanations, e.g. genes, society, economic forces.

“...as man is a being of self-made wealth,
so he is a being of self-made soul”

— John Galt

How is character formed?

- How does a person shape his own soul? How does a person cultivate his moral character by his own choices?
- Today: Aristotle on the cultivation of moral character
- ATLOSCon in May: Ayn Rand on pride

Aristotle: Virtue

- Happiness is “the chief good” of life.
- Virtue is spiritual excellence in living, i.e. “activity of the soul in accordance with complete excellence.”
- Virtue involves thought, feeling, and action.
- Virtue is necessary to happiness.

Aristotle: Not Nature

- How does a person become virtuous or vicious?
- Character is not determined “by nature,” nor learned via instruction.
- Rather, “we are adapted by nature to receive [virtues], and are made perfect by habit.”

Aristotle: Habituation

- Moral virtues are cultivated by repeated virtuous action — not acting by rote, but deliberate, thoughtful practice of virtuous actions.
- How does that practice shape a person's character?

Aristotle: Habituation

- Aristotle: “We become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts.”

Aristotle: Habituation

- Aristotle: “We become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts.”
- That’s not just true in the trivial sense: a person is changed by his actions.
- That’s not due to rote habits: virtue and vice always involves deliberation.

Aristotle: Virtue as Like a Skill

- Virtue is partly like a skill, whereby a person gradually improves with practice, like lyre-playing and house-building.
- That practice trains a person's reason and emotions into distinctive patterns.

Cognitive Training

- By his actions, a person endorses and entrenches certain premises and principles.
 - Example: Robert Stadler on Rearden Metal and Project X.
- A person gains moral knowledge with experience.
 - Example: Hank Rearden's affair with Dagny.

Emotional Training

- By his actions, a person endorses and entrenches certain value-judgments and emotions.
 - Example: Dagny puts down the phone.
- Emotions that are in harmony with reason support virtue and enable unconflicted happiness.
 - Example: John Galt's moment out-of-context.

Recap: Cultivating Character

- The cultivation of character requires deliberate, thoughtful practice of certain kinds of actions.
- Such actions train our reason and emotions into “second nature” patterns of virtue and vice.

Three Questions

- What is moral character?
- How is a person's character formed by his choices?
- How does a person's character affect his thoughts and actions?

What are character's effects?

- How does a person's character affect his thoughts, feelings, and actions?
- Does a person's character override his free will?

Effects of Character

- A person's character makes some thoughts, feelings, and actions easy, familiar, comfortable, natural, pleasurable, the default — while others are not.
- Even the strongest character cannot override free will: a person can always act out-of-character.

Effects of Character

- What are some examples of the ways in which character affects thoughts, feelings, and actions?
- How does your character affect your thoughts, feelings, and actions?

The Question

- Why did Tony act so rationally to protect his life and health in those desperate circumstances, while others did not?

The Lesson

Every action that you take in life matters.

Every action entrenches certain premises, principles, and value-judgments into your psyche, thereby shaping your future thoughts, feelings, and actions.