

Purpose-Positing:

A method of concept-formation for purposive concepts

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How is one to explain the formation of concepts such as “but,” “justice,” “beauty,” “oxygen,” and “circle?”

Ayn Rand regards *measurement-omission* as a vital step in concept-formation, but only “circle” seems amenable to the process of measurement-omission; in that *regardless* of diameter, a circle is a continuous line equidistant around a central point. This is a suitable method for studying concepts in geometry, and by extension, physics and physical objects.¹ However, what measurements are omitted to isolate entities designated by concepts, like “but,” “justice,” or “intuitive?” Non-material objects, devoid of physicality, are not subject to numerical measurement and leave her theory of measurement-omission wanting.

An alternative method is to distinguish between man and nature to reveal two categories of concepts, *purposive* and *non-purposive* concepts.

Non-purposive concepts are amenable to measurement-omission; while those that are “pure-purposive,” such as “and” or “but,” are not at all. Their “what” relies exclusively on their (cognitive) purpose; while “matter-purposive” concepts such as *oxygen tank* are mixed, wherein, an oxygen tank *must* hold *some* quantity of oxygen to be tank, but can hold *any* quantity—*for* personal or industrial use. One may say that there are “working” concepts, such as “but;” and “free-standing” concepts, like triangles and pyramids.

¹ Indeed, the concept of measurement-omission is known in the English language by such terms as *regardless* and *despite*. Evident in her learning materials, Maria Montessori certainly grasped this decades before Ayn Rand.

A purposive perspective on concept-formation shows the limits of the Objectivist theory. However, by drawing on Ayn Rand's distinction between the metaphysical versus the man-made, we see that concepts in each realm are formed by different methods, and that on occasion with man-made concepts of physicality, like oxygen-tank, both methods are employed.

The purpose of "and" is to bring two concepts or propositions together for consideration in a relationship, while "but" aims to separate or qualify two concepts or propositions. We form the concept "but" by observing the common purpose to which it is employed by method of *purpose-positing*.

By establishing the *purpose* of the concept, we are able to grasp *what* it is.

We isolate the essence by isolating its purpose.

The PBS show *This Old House* shows its hosts proffer purposes to new gadgets. What is this *for*? To know what it is *for* is to know what it *is*. The suspense of this epistemological game hinges on our ignorance of an alien object's purpose. Once the purpose is revealed, we instantly get it—the marvel of *what* it is.

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