Though "meaning" is a term used in more than one sense, the point can be put in the following way. The meaning of a concept is the existents it integrates, with all their characteristics. The meaning of a proposition is the limited fact it states: the subject's possession of a certain characteristic(s).

The Cognitive Function of a Proposition

In a tantalizingly brief lead to the cognitive function of propositions, Rand states:

> Since concepts, in the field of cognition, perform a function similar to that of numbers in the field of mathematics, the function of a proposition is similar to that of an equation: it applies conceptual abstractions to a specific problem. [ITOE, 75]

An analysis of propositions in terms of subject and characteristics suggests how to flesh out Rand's statement. First, her statement has to be understood correctly. Her point, as I read it, is not that a proposition equates subject and predicate — not, absurdly, that "Lassie is a dog" says that "Lassie = dog" — but, as she says, that there is a similarity in *function* between a proposition and an equation. The overall function of propositions and of equations is to advance our knowledge. "Lassie is a dog" advances our knowledge in a manner similar to the way "$2 + 3 = 5$" advances it.

But just how does the arithmetic equation advance our knowledge? What is the "specific problem" that "$2 + 3 = 5$" solves? The problem is to identify the overall quantity of a group, a group known to consist of a pair and a trio. But there are an unlimited number of other equations that would also identify the quantity of $2 + 3$:

$$2 + 3 = 4 + 1$$
$$2 + 3 = 18 - (4 + 9)$$
$$2 + 3 = \text{the cube root of } 125$$

And so on. Every valid equation makes a connection between terms on the left side of the equal sign and terms on the right. Propositions, likewise, make a connection between subject and predicate. Establishing a connection between arithmetic terms or between subject and predicate means

that knowledge can be applied: knowledge of what is on the right side of an equation, or knowledge stored by the predicate of a proposition.

Why, though, is "5" *the* answer to the question, "What is the quantity of a group composed of two units and three units?" What is wrong with giving as the sum "18 − (4 + 9)"? The answer is that "5" is the most unit-economical way of stating that group's quantity. Giving the sum as "5" makes available the greatest amount of other knowledge. "5" gives direct access to all the facts in the "5" file folder, such as that the quantity is 1 more than 4, that it is the same as the quantity of fingers on one hand, is odd, prime, has no integer square root, is the cube root of 125, etc. Identifying the sum of "2 + 3" as "5" implicitly relates that quantity to the whole integrated set of mathematical facts that we have stored, carry forward, and continue to learn more about. The one term "5" on the right-hand side of the equation relates the two terms on the left to a kind of "central repository" for information on this quantity.

Propositions perform a similar function. The proposition "Lassie is a dog" enables us to apply to Lassie all the knowledge of dogs stored in the "dog" file, which is the "central repository" for information on this kind of animal.

We can see the same point by approaching it from another direction. Since the source of all information is perceptual observation, the question arises: how can applying concepts in a proposition move us forward, cognitively? Since the Realist theory of concepts is false, since concepts are not an independent means of access to reality, revealing an "essence" that is hidden from perception, what does the application of concepts add to what we already know from perception?

The answer is: relationships. Identifying that Lassie is a dog relates her to other dogs, to other animals, to plants, and (going in the other direction) to other breeds of dogs, to kennels, leashes, dog-owners, dogfood, etc. To identify, in a descriptive proposition, that Lassie is friendly, relates her to other friendly dogs, unfriendly dogs, friendly and unfriendly people, stories of friendship, psychological causes of friendship, types of friendship (Aristotle distinguished three of them), friendships that turn into romances, issues of loyalty to friends, etc. Some of these relationships are perceptually available, others are graspable only through intermediate abstractions, but are reducible back to perception. The point is that the word or concept is not just "a label," but a file folder stocked with a growing wealth of knowledge about the units.

In this regard, the file-folder analogy can be misunderstood: some physical file folders store concretes. E.g., a file folder for bank statements contains all