

Houston Objectivism Society Newsletter

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Next HOS Meeting

The October HOS meeting will feature a lecture by Anna Franco titled "Francis Bacon: The Father of the Scientific Method".

This lecture will examine the ideas of philosopher of science Francis Bacon. Bacon (1561-1626) is considered the father of the scientific method. He wrote that induction should play a major role in scientific thinking and spent nearly 180 pages outlining an example of the inductive method: finding the form of heat. In his work the *Novum Organum*, he argues that the Greek philosophies are not substantial enough and that a new theory of knowledge must be established. Through the use of brilliant analogies, he demonstrates his own epistemology.

His work both relies on and was relied on by the works of other scientists. He references the works of William Gilbert, a scientist who did original work in the realm of electricity and magnetism. Robert Boyle, an English chemist, followed Bacon's ideas for the proper way of writing down experiments.

Bacon is usually neglected in classrooms, and deserves more attention. This lecture is not meant to be a scholarly collection of his thoughts, but rather an overview of his philosophy. It is designed to serve as an introduction to those who would like to investigate further.

NEW LOCATION: Clubroom of Harry King's apartment complex, The Hermitage, 2828 Bammel Lane. (This is a 12-story building). Bammel Lane is between Buffalo Speedway and Kirby, and connects Westheimer and Alabama. Go to the guard's house and say you are visiting Harry King. The guard will let you into the clubhouse. Parking is limited in front of the building. Park on Bammel Lane if spots are unavailable inside the complex.

The good news: No rental fee is necessary for the room.

Anthem Essay Winner: In Celebration

by Missy Bailey

"I celebrate myself..." So Walt Whitman once wrote, and his words effectively characterize humanity, for almost everything the human race has done-- from great works of literature to painting and sculpture and music and poetry, has been in celebration of itself or the world as it relates to humans. And so is *Anthem* too a celebration; the entire book is a hymn in praise of the individual, and freedom, and the human spirit. Ayn Rand clearly expresses this theme of *Anthem* in three quotations from her novel.

"It is a sin to write this. It is a sin to think words no others think..." So Equality 7-2521 begins his story, and with these words effectively sums up his entire world. *Anthem* tells of a place where people abandon the concept of the individual in favor of collectivism-- where "we" means everything and "I" is unspeakable; communism in its most extreme form. The concept of equality in itself has become distorted; people have come to believe that people are only equal when

they are exactly the same. In this society, almost medieval in its lack of technology, people are forcefully kept on the same level through ignorance. No individual abilities or talents are recognized; when Equality reinvents electricity the Council denies it because it was a discovery made by one. In this particular quote, the use of the word "sin" is especially effective; it shows how this society's view of right and wrong has been distorted, how they define morality solely on the basis of "we." Their relentless enforcement of collectivism drives everything else away-- friendship, love, joy, pride, and even hope. The end and the beginning of life is work, and people cannot even take pride in their work because

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anything in relation to themselves alone. Equality's success at school causes him shame rather than pride, and he rejoices at the appointment of street sweeper because he sees it as a just punishment for wanting anything. Thus personal ability is squandered so that the delicate balance of this world remains. It is a balance that could be all too easily upset, and so for this reason all those with intelligence, with curiosity, with restlessness, are carefully kept out of positions of authority. The society of *Anthem* seeks to abolish every emotion, everything that makes people what they are, and reduce them-- not to animals, for even animals work for their own survival-- but to machines.

Equality's discovery of the word "I" sends him into a violent

rejection of everything his world taught him. Instead of his life being defined in terms of others, he thinks of his existence in terms of himself. With the words, "I wished to know the meaning of things. I am the meaning;" he celebrates the discovery of "I"-- the discovery, in effect, of himself. He will no longer do or think something because it will benefit others, but because it will benefit himself. In this quote "I" has a double meaning-- Equality refers not just to himself but to the very word and all it symbolizes, the concept of the individual, of one. He believes that, simply by existing, by being, he gives significance to the world and to life-- it is not necessary for him to work or struggle towards any end, because his being there, simply alive, is an end in itself; and by being there to see and judge he gives meaning to the world. The entire chapter that contains this quote is a celebration of Equality's revelation of that most basic of concepts, which modern society takes so much for granted-- the concept of a person as just that, a human being, with his or her own hopes, dreams, intelligence, importance, and rights, that no one else can take away-- "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"-- the pursuit of happiness being the key phrase here, for it is this that Equality was formally denied. The society he lived under withheld from him and all human beings anything that might make them happy, such as enjoyment and pride in work, freedom to use their abilities, love for another person, friendship.

Happiness and freedom go hand in hand; in order to have the one, you must first have the other. And so when Equality states that "I am the meaning," he declares his freedom, and once and for all breaks the chains that have held him all his life-- and thus opens the way to happiness.

He rounds out his new philosophy with the statement, "I owe nothing to my brothers, nor do I gather debts from them." With these words he renders himself absolutely free: not only does he have the right to happiness, but he owes nothing to anyone else. He is held under no obligation, bound by no duties or promises, and if he gives company or help to another it is by his own free will, not because he is beholden to do so. He embraces the extreme opposite of what he grew up believing, and asserts his freedom-- the sweetest and simplest kind of freedom; the ability to do what he pleases. For the rest of his life he will make his choices based on how they will affect him, not others, and he will define right and wrong not in terms of people but a person, and thus live a happy life rather than one of duty and labor. The second part of the quote, however, is just as important as the first. Equality emphasizes his own freedom and at the same time everyone else's-- he expects people to ask nothing of him; but he asks nothing of them, either. Self-reliance, not selfishness, is the key to his philosophy. He allows the same freedom to everyone else that he gives to himself, and so, though his philosophy ultimately centers

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on himself, he does not expect the rest of the human race to do so. Thus, as the first quote effectively depicts the world of his society, so this one sums up Equality's way of thinking. Both aspects of it are important: the freedom of the self, and the freedom of others; and it is this double freedom, Equality believes, that will ultimately create happiness for everyone.

Anthem is an especially appropriate title for this novel, for it is in every way an anthem, a song, a celebration of the human spirit. Equality-- or Prometheus, as he names himself in the end-- is on a quest that everyone can relate to, a quest to find himself. He learns to deny what society has told him is right and to live for his own happiness; to think and act for himself and take pride in who he is. It is something everyone hopes to learn.

Meeting Summaries

On Saturday, August 8 Neil Erian presented his analysis of Raphael's painting "Philosophy" (often called "School of Athens"). This painting depicts many intellectual figures from throughout the history of ideas, engaged in conversation, demonstration, or writing. Aristotle and Plato, walking toward the viewer and in conversation, dominate the center

of the painting, with Plato pointing to the heavens and Aristotle with his palm toward the Earth. Neil carefully led attendees through the painting's many figures, identifying some of them from the history of ideas. Because these figures span all of the ages, and are not merely from ancient Greece, and because all of them are engaged in exchanges of ideas and are related to the two central figures, the painting concretizes the general process of thought.

The unity of the painting in presenting the broad intellectual tradition of the West (as Harry King said "a marketplace of ideas") is more fundamental than the conflict of ideas between its two central figures.

The September HOS meeting featured a movie share, in which members briefly discussed a favorite movie which other members might find enjoyable. Harry King won a gift certificate to AMC Theaters for presenting the movie most likely to be watched.

The following are brief summaries of two of the movies discussed.

Why watch the movie *Hamlet*? I'm firmly convinced that Shakespeare himself would love the Franco Zeffirelli version of one of his most renowned plays. (Not to be confused with

the more recent Kenneth Branagh version of *Hamlet*.) To begin, the cast is perfect, from the actors playing *Hamlet* and his uncle to the actresses playing the Queen and Ophelia. You may at first scoff upon hearing that *Hamlet* is played by Mel Gibson--but Gibson is *Hamlet*, and by the end of the movie, you won't be able to imagine anyone else playing the part. I show this movie to my senior English students, and the engaging plot, masterful dialogue, and colorful characters keep them completely intrigued until the final shot. Whether or not you've enjoyed reading Shakespearean plays, watching this movie will enable you to discover or rediscover what makes him one of the most revered playwrights in history.

"Battle of the Bulge" is the story of the Germans' last, surprise assault during the closing days of World War II, and how the Americans defeated them. It's nearing Christmas 1944, and the Americans think the war is over--all except a Colonel Kiley, played by Henry Fonda. Kiley is a former police inspector who spent his career "asking questions," and who pointedly tells his superior that "having been an inspector of police doesn't disqualify me from thinking." On reconnaissance missions, Kiley has seen a number of puzzling things that convince him that the Germans are about to launch a counter-offensive. The viewer watches as Kiley

integrates disparate facts such as the appearance of Tiger tanks in the woods of France, the transfer of a competent and fanatical German tank commander (played by Robert Shaw) to the region, the presence of rubber hoses in the possession of front-line German troops, and German gasoline barrels that float. What he makes of these facts permits him not only

to warn his superiors about an impending German attack, but also to decide how to defeat them. Kiley's intelligence is contrasted with the German commander's ideologically inspired love of war. The movie dramatizes the role of intelligence and reason in military success.

October Arts Event

Romantic Piano Performance
Solo piano and chamber works of Chopin, Faure'
Brian Connelly, piano; Sergiu Luca, violin; others

October 11, Sunday, 4:00 p.m.

Rice University, Alice Pratt Brown Hall. Use entrance 8 on University Boulevard (Note: University Blvd. intersects Main Street near Rice at the red rectangle.)

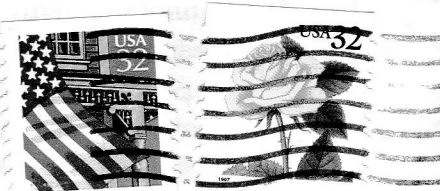
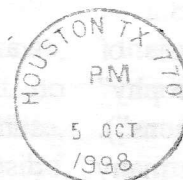
Dinner afterwards: Butera's Fine Foods & Delicatessen at 4621 Montrose.

No reservations required. Attendees may purchase tickets at the performance.



Warren Ross with essay contest winners Missy Bailey, Sarah Moorhead, and Brennan Gage

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