

THE HOUSTON OBJECTIVISM SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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December 1989

HOS TO STUDY THE NEWS

The next HOS meeting will be held on January 26 at the University of Houston Student Center in the Embassy room. The meeting will start at 7:30 pm. The program will be a discussion of current news. Taped broadcasts of all three major networks will be shown, followed by a discussion of the premises underlying the content and style of those broadcasts. This program will be of interest to anyone following current events.

Michael Mazzone will furnish a snack of cold cuts and cheese. The evening promises to be entertaining and informative.

TOS CONFERENCE

by Dwyane Hicks and Brian Phillips

The first annual Texas Objectivism Societies Conference was held in Austin during the weekend of November 10-12. More than fifty people attended the conference. Next year's conference will be held in Houston, and will be chaired by Dwyane Hicks. The following are summaries of the papers and workshops presented at the conference:

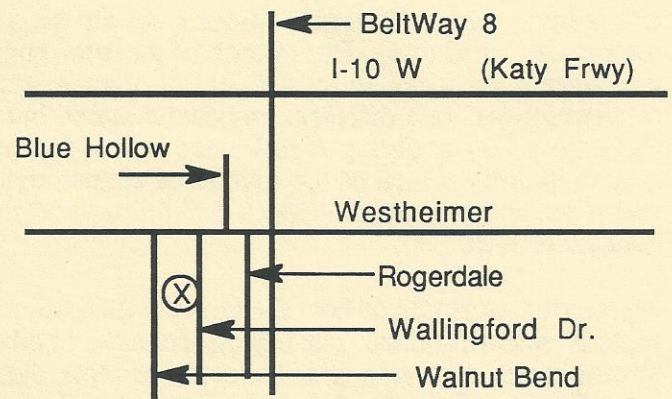
Warren Ross delivered a paper titled "How Johnny Can Add." In this paper, Warren explained that most teachers- under the influence of modern philosophy- do not understand important epistemological concepts, e.g., the hierarchical nature of knowledge, and the need to make abstract concepts real. The result is the destruction of math, and students who retain information only long enough to regurgitate it for the next test, and/or are turned off math entirely. Warren presented Objectivist-inspired solutions to the problem and provided numerous examples to effectively concretize his approach.

James Konzak spoke on "The Moral and Military Aspects of Trade with the Soviet Union." Mr. Konzak, publisher of "The Konzak Report- In Defense of Freedom", detailed the many ways in which totalitarian nations benefit from trade with the West. In contrast to most media reports, Mr. Konzak demonstrated that communist governments remain a serious threat to Western freedom.

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HOS NEW YEAR'S PARTY

The HOS New Year's Eve Party will be held on December 31, from 7:30 pm to midnight. The party will be held in the Wallingford Apartments Clubhouse at 2750 Wallingford Dr. (see map below). Snacks and soft drinks will be served; bring your own liquor. For further information, call Dwyane Hicks at 781-3609. So that he may properly prepare for the party, Dwyane asks that those planning to attend contact him in advance.



PHILLIPS' FUN NIGHTS

The following are the events scheduled for the next two Phillips' Fun Nights. The address is 5655 Glenmont, Apt. 210. Brian and Dawn's phone number is 668-0453.

January 6, 6:00 pm - Food Night. Come enjoy an evening of Italian food and conversation. Chef Brian will prepare lasagne.

February 3, 1:00 pm- Tour of Art Galleries in the Montrose/Museum area.

PROFILE- WARREN ROSS

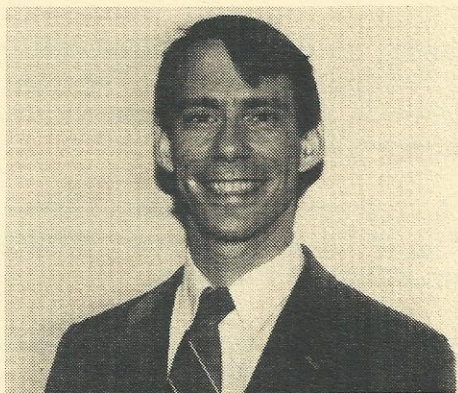
I was introduced to Objectivism in 1968 by my 10th grade geometry teacher, Herb Grossman. Herb has taught for more than three decades in the New York/New Jersey schools, and is still teaching students about both math and Objectivism today. The day Herb brought up Objectivism was one of those "blow-off" days in the public schools, when the school is mandated by law to not teach anything new because one or another religion has a preponderance of its adherents absent. So instead of proceeding with geometrical theorems, Herb talked about political philosophy. He introduced us to the concept of individual rights, and specifically to the idea (new to me at that time) that there is no essential difference between fascism and communism. He explained that the essential polarity in political philosophy is between laissez-faire capitalism on the one hand and statism of any variety on the other hand.

I was hooked. The explanations he gave were so cogent, and his answers to questions from the students were so clear, that I was convinced by his arguments. Fortunately, he did not stop there. He told us that these ideas were not original with him, that they were the achievement of Ayn Rand, and he recommended that we read *The Virtue of Selfishness*. I did. Then I read Ayn Rand's novels and other non-fiction within a year. I was very fortunate that in reading all of these philosophical works, and trying to understand this complex philosophical system, I had access to Herb continually. By giving me many examples, and setting me straight when I had a bizarre interpretation, he led me gently by the hand to understand such concepts as "psycho-epistemology", "metaphysical value-judgments", "economic vs. political power", "the sanction of the victim", and "Conceptual Common Denominator".

Objectivism has been of inestimable benefit to me. Having a rational ethical code is the most important benefit. However, I also wish to emphasize Objectivism's direct contribution to my career. The Objectivist epistemology has been very valuable in helping me to organize and integrate conceptual material in the sciences. The epistemology has also given me guidance in making scientific discoveries. Let me give an example of each.

In graduate school, I learned about a certain kind of probability distribution, called "Gaussian" (after the mathematician Gauss). But in each of the three engineering courses in which this distribution was discussed, the concept was defined by a *different* mathematical formula. Each formula represented the expression of "Gaussianness" in a different physical context, but "Gaussianness" as such was not identified by any of the professors. By applying Ayn Rand's rule of fundamentality for extracting a defining characteristic, I was able to identify which of the myriad of characteristics of Gaussian distributions was at the root of all three formulas, and I could develop a definition valid in all the conventional engineering contexts in which the concept is used.

My second example of how the Objectivist epistemology has helped me in my career relates to organizing a mass of scientific data. For my dissertation, I had collected data on the propagation of light through foggy atmospheres. In trying to make sense of these data, I recalled that the essence of concept-formation is the identification of similarities and differences. So I made an explicit list of similarities and differences among various parts of the data. This led me to see regularities that I could then formulate in terms of physical principles. In formulating those principles, I was also guided by a tenet of Objectivist epistemology: An inductive generalization is not certain unless one has an *explanation* for the observed regularities.



Warren Ross

In conclusion, I want to express my profoundest appreciation to Ayn Rand as the originator of Objectivism, and to Herb Grossman for introducing me to Objectivism. I'd also like to make a plug for the movie version of *The Fountainhead*. We are all aware of its deficiencies relative to the book. Some have wondered whether *anybody* could become interested in Objectivism by watching the movie. Yet, one night toward the end of the 1950's Herb Grossman came home, flipped on the television, and watched the late movie, which happened to be *The Fountainhead*. His life has not been the same since then, and from the time I met him in 1968, neither has mine.

PROFILE ANSWER SHEET

Use the following questions to help write your profile. You can include your profile with your renewal coupon, or send it to: P.O. Box 53791 Houston, TX 77052

1. How were you introduced to Objectivism? Was there anything unusual or particularly interesting about your introduction?
2. What were your reactions to this introduction?
3. How has Objectivism influenced your life? Your career?
4. What thoughts do you have regarding the future of Objectivism? Your own future in regards to Objectivism?
5. What experiences have you had as a result of your interest in Objectivism?

1990 FOUNTAINHEAD ESSAY CONTEST TO BE TAX DEDUCTIBLE

The 1990 *The Fountainhead* Essay Contest is now underway. This year, the Ayn Rand Institute will collect regional prizes and award prizes to the winning students directly. *This will allow contributors to the local contest to claim a tax deduction.* Checks should be sent to Warren Ross, but those wishing to take a tax deduction should make the checks payable to The Ayn Rand Institute. The deadline for contributions is June 1. Those wishing to pledge for the contest can do so on the HOS MEMBERSHIP COUPON below.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

It is again time for HOS members to renew their membership. Dues are \$10 per year. Current members will find a stamped, addressed envelope enclosed. Those who have received a complimentary copy of the newsletter are invited to join HOS. Membership forms and dues can be sent to:

Warren Ross
1903 Ganyard
Houston, TX 77043

HOS MEMBERSHIP COUPON

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____ APT. _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

HOME PHONE _____ WORK PHONE _____

I would like to pledge \$ _____ to 1990's *The Fountainhead* Essay Contest.

MONTESSORI RENAISSANCE CONFERENCE

by Anna Franco

On November 3-5 the Montessori Renaissance Conference was held in Dallas. The featured keynote speakers were Dr. Michael Berliner, director of the Ayn Rand Institute, and Rita Kramer, a well known biographer of Maria Montessori. The following are summaries of Rita Kramer's speech "The Method and the Message", and Dr. Berliner's workshop on "Montessori and the Public Schools". A summary of Dr. Berliner's keynote speech is unavailable; however, audiotapes of the workshop and the keynote speech will soon be available from the HOS library.

"The Method and the Message" After describing the background and achievements of Maria Montessori, Rita Kramer attacked modern educators for their distortion of four key concepts: freedom, equity, self-esteem, and creativity. Each of these concepts are important in a classroom, and if they are twisted so as to undercut their real meanings, the results are disastrous. Examples of how equity and self-esteem are distorted are given below.

Equity: Equity should mean equality in opportunity, but today it means equality in results. This is not only true in the political arena, but in the educational one as well. The only way to insure that all students have the same results from education is to lower standards to the lowest common denominator, which is what is happening in public schools today.

Self-esteem: Lowering standards also serves to raise the self-esteem of the children, according to modern educators. Instead of believing that self-esteem is the result of hard work and achievement, as Montessori does, they believe that the child's self-esteem comes from the teacher's praise. Thus, school has become a place where children are automatically told they are great, rather than a place where they learn how to be competent in the world.

"Montessori and Public Schools" While there are more dangerous threats to the Montessori movement, Dr. Berliner argued that trying to mainstream the method into the public school would be a tactical error on the part of Montessorians. Doing so would result in loss of control of the method in the public classroom and in possible destruction of private Montessori schools through subsidized competition.

Dr. Berliner pointed out that with government funds comes government control. The officials in the education department- i.e., those who would control the integration of Montessori into public schools- would have no special interest or understanding of the method, and therefore, would have little concern for the integrity of the method. The result would be a watered down version of the method, becoming less recognizable over time.

At the same time, the private schools dedicated to upholding quality would be faced with subsidized competition. In the early stages of the mainstreaming process, many parents would withdraw their children from private schools to take advantage of the same education in the "free" public schools. This would drive many of the private schools out of business. Dr. Berliner gave the Netherlands as an example of a country which brought Montessori into the public schools. Today, there are few, if any, private Montessori schools in the Netherlands.

The integration of Montessori into the public school system may have short term benefits by improving the education of public school children. However, in the long term such action would destroy the Montessori movement by closing down private schools, and by rendering that which does get implemented in the public schools unrecognizable as Montessori education.

RIDPATH LECTURE

(continued from page 3)

hence the term "natural rights". Professor Ridpath then traced the development of this concept by the Stoics (Cicero introduced the idea of individualism), Hugo Grotius and John Locke. He also traced the perversion of the concept of "rights" by such men as Thomas Hobbes, David Hume, and Immanuel Kant, and the subsequent existential results, e.g., the Holocaust, the Russian Revolution, and the New Deal.

Professor Ridpath concluded by explaining Ayn Rand's contribution to our understanding of "rights". Uniquely, she understood that politics rests upon more fundamental branches of philosophy-that to validate individual rights one must have the proper ethics, epistemology, and metaphysics.

MOVIE REVIEW: *The Accused*

by Warren Ross

This story, based on a real trial, dramatizes the aftermath of a gang rape. Jody Foster plays the victim, and Kelly McGillis plays the Assistant District Attorney assigned to prosecute the case. There are actually two cases- one to prosecute the rapists, and a second to prosecute those who incited the rape. This second, unprecedented case, was based upon the legal principle that it is a crime to encourage, incite, or otherwise contribute to the commission of a felony.

The Accused is dramatically well-balanced, for the victim does not have an admirable life-style- she cruises bars, drinks to excess, smokes marijuana, and is a sexual tease. Some have said that she deserved what happened to her; however, the events of the movie make it clear that she was not a voluntary participant. Jody Foster (who won an Oscar for her performance) movingly portrays the agony of a woman who is deemed to have no rights because she is not a "high-class" person.

This movie has a number of remarkable aspects, including: 1) an uncompromising moral stand against crime, including those who do not commit a physical act, but sanction, aid and abet those who do; 2) an explicit dramatization of the fact that criminals *choose* to take the actions they take (there are two scenes which place deliberate emphasis on this fact); 3) a strong pro-victim stance- the victim is not treated as a faceless statistic, but as an individual pursuing values; 4) an implicit condemnation of the plea-bargaining system (the three rapists plead guilty to a lesser charge and might have received as little as nine months in jail); 5) no trace of the feminist view that all men, rapists or not, exploit women. Any one of these characteristics in a film about rape would make it noteworthy. All five make this film a rare value.

The Accused is now available on video.

PROFESSOR RIDPATH LECTURES AT UH AND A&M

Professor John Ridpath lectured at the University of Houston on Sunday, October 29. Nearly sixty people attended the lecture, titled "Ayn Rand and the History of Individual Rights". The following evening, Professor Ridpath delivered the same lecture to forty-five students at Texas A&M in College Station.

Professor Ridpath was pleased with the attendance at both lectures, and said he would like to return to Texas next year. During the Question and Answer period, he addressed a wide range of questions. The movie version of *Atlas Shrugged*, he said, has once again been put on hold because of difficulties in securing a suitable script. Ed Snider no longer has rights to the movie. Professor Ridpath also announced that he has begun work on a book on the concept of individual rights, of which his lecture was part of his research and thinking on the subject.

In his lecture, Professor Ridpath stressed that the concept of "rights"- like all concepts- refers to something specific in reality. To discover what the concept refers to, we must examine the historical record to understand what it was that men were attempting to discover and identify when they used the term "rights".

The search begins about 400 BC, when the Greeks attempted to understand both the nature of man *and* the ethical concept of "right", i.e., the good. The Greeks attempted to understand these issues by looking
(continued on page 4)

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH	APRIL
6- Food Night 26- HOS Meeting	3- Art Gallery Tour 14- Valentine's Day	?- HOS Meeting	21- San Jacinto Day

SUMMARY OF TOS CONFERENCE

(continued from page 1)

Dr. Gary Pecquet discussed the relationship between philosophy and economics in "Theory and History from the Classical Economists to the Progressives." In this paper, Dr. Pecquet demonstrated that the collapse of Classical Economics was directly tied to the influence of Kantian philosophy.

In "Naturalism vs. Romanticism as Expressed in the Work of Millet and Breton," Revital Brook examined two contrasting senses-of-life. Millet (the Naturalist) viewed life as hopeless, and humans as wretched creatures incapable of escaping misery. Breton, however, viewed man as an heroic being and in control of his own destiny. The contrasts in values, worldview, style and effect were particularly dramatic because both artists had come from peasantry and selected peasant life as their subject.

Austin playwright Ann Ciccolella presented a reading of her play "Madame X," which dealt with artistic integrity, as, as dramatized by the struggle of John Singer Sargent to establish himself as an artist. Pete Jamison examined the relationship between the decline of philosophy and the decline of art in "Artistic Trends of the Twentieth Century." Athena Productions presented a workshop on "Presenting Objectivist Ideas in the Media." Anna Franco presented a workshop of "Charity in the Workplace", based on her own experiences with a large company that aggressively promotes altruism to manipulate employees into donating to the United Way.

Other activities during the conference included a Friday night reception, a volleyball game and a dance. There was also a "Free Market" Monopoly tournament (the rules are modified to more accurately reflect laissez-faire.

As co-sponsor of the conference, HOS would like to thank everyone who helped make it a success. Anyone wishing to help with next year's conference should contact Dwyane Hicks at 781-3609.

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Happy Holidays!