

THE HOUSTON OBJECTIVISM SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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February 1990

HOS TO DISCUSS MEDICAL ETHICS

The next HOS meeting will be held on March 30 in the Tejas Room of the Student Center on the University of Houston Campus. The meeting will begin at 7:30 pm.

The program will consist of a round-table discussion on medical ethics. Included will be such issues as genetic engineering, biotechnology and euthanasia. By mid-March, all HOS members will receive a mailing with a summary of the issues to be discussed, as well as the ethical issues being raised by these new medical practices.

The evening should prove to be informative and interesting, and will provide everyone with an opportunity to learn more about issues which will ultimately affect all of us.

FICTION-WRITING LECTURES

Ayn Rand's Lectures on Fiction-Writing will be hosted by Brian Phillips beginning on March 11. The lectures will begin at 9:00 am, and run on consecutive Sundays (there will be no lecture on Easter Sunday). For more information on the lecture series, contact Brian at 668-0453.

MONTESSORI VIDEO ON TV

Montessori: An Educational Renaissance, a twenty-five minute documentary video on the Montessori Method of education, will air on the Access Houston cable channel on March 3. Air times are: 7:30 am, 11:30 am, 3:30 pm, 7:30 pm, and 11:30 pm. Check with your cable company for the proper channel. TELL YOUR FRIENDS TO WATCH IT!

Produced by HOS members Jeff Crow, Anna Franco, Dawn Phillips and Brian Phillips, the video examines the basic principles of the Montessori Method. HOS President Warren Ross is interviewed on camera and HOS member Pete Jamison serves as narrator.

HOS STUDIES THE NEWS

by Dwyane Hicks

The last HOS meeting, held on January 26, was productive, exciting and fun. Members were presented with two taped network stories, each as broadcast by all three major networks. Prior to viewing each story, two HOS members volunteered to voice their opinions about what was presented and answer questions from the audience.

The first story focused on Congressional testimony regarding Clayton Hartwig, a sailor accused by the Navy of committing suicide aboard the U.S.S. Iowa by sabotaging gunpowder. The Navy said Hartwig was motivated by a desire to leave his alleged homosexual lover a \$100,000 life insurance policy. Brian Phillips led the discussion, while Richard Beals and Jeff Crow braved the interrogatory assault from the audience.

NBC and ABC presented similar stories to the effect that Hartwig was not homosexual and not suicidal, but rather the victim of a Navy smear serving to cover-up an inadequate safety program. CBS however, presented testimony from the same witnesses which allowed the viewer to draw opposite conclusions. It was revealed that Hartwig had not only talked of suicide, but had warned his friend, the benefactor of the life insurance policy, that the witness would "see that I was serious when you turn around and find that I am gone."

CBS provided the viewer with evidence supporting both explanations- the Navy's and the sailors'- of the cause of the explosion, while the other two networks, by careful video cropping, blatantly ignored any evidence supporting the Navy's investigation. To this viewer, the major point demonstrated was how easily manipulable we are even when being presented visual material.

The second story concerned the invasion of Panama. Dwyane Hicks led the discussion, while Joe Blackburn

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PROFILE- PETE JAMISON

I was sitting in my high school sophomore English class in 1975 looking through the book service order forms provided to such classes when I got bored with them and asked to see the teacher's version. Though I didn't buy anything from the advanced catalogue, one of its descriptions stuck in my mind- "a citizen of a future totalitarian state rediscovers the forgotten word 'I,'" the pitch for Rand's *Anthem*. And in late 1977 at the Texas A&M bookstore, I beheld a whole rackful of Rand paperbacks and decided to start with *For the New Intellectual*. My attempt to absorb the new ideas then lasted a tumultuous three years, during which a philosophy professor at Sam Houston State advised me to drop the stuff. I listened to him for less than a semester, then went back to the Rand material to check his premises and hers. I've found myself in the Rand camp ever since.

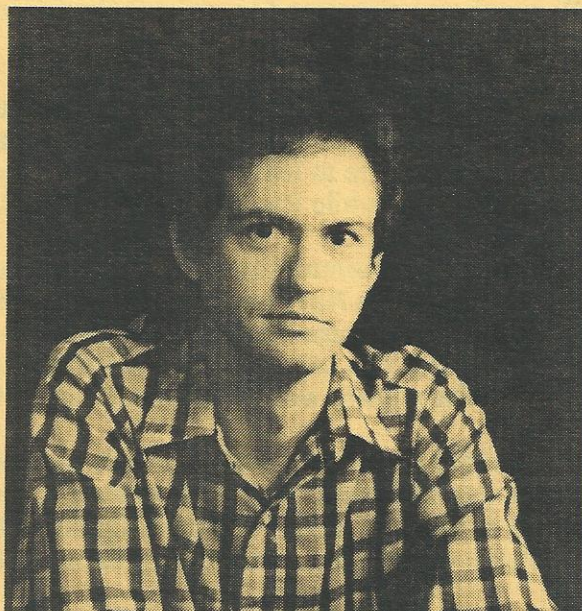
The major immediate benefit that I received from Rand's thought was a clarification of the similarities and differences between the U.S. political left and right. To me, the right represented the free market and the left represented free choice in ideas and lifestyle- both of which were alternatives I supported. But the right also produced the police "brutality" of the 1968 Democratic convention and the left produced those who encouraged the mob violence- both of which I opposed. Was politics inconsistent, or was I? I had always known that I was economically "conservative" and culturally "liberal", but I had never known why. I was pleased that Ayn Rand pinned the problem on current politics and not on me, and relieved that her politics (and therefore, her philosophy) provided a way out of the false alternatives with which I had been struggling. (And it was quite a struggle. At one point I was looking to Ed Sanders, Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman for answers. Such figures may be important as players in U.S. political history, but their novel polemics contain only socialism).

As to the future... I think that if we can ride out the 1990's, we'll probably be ok. It promises to be a rough decade as we await developments like important Objectivist publication events (the epistemology book, the Peikoff Treatise, the Rand diaries, etc.), continued development of the campus clubs, and local activity expansion. But due to the historically unprecedented preponderance of printing presses, books, recorded matter and other forms of information storage, I think it's already too late to kill Objectivism. If Aristotle can survive a dark age, we can still do quite a bit today, even given the worst of modern possibilities.

Toward the end of hastening the return of reason, I've begun a one-man library donation program since 1987. I simply find a small library and check their stock for Rand volumes. If the place has anything by Rand, it's usually just a few of the novels, most printings of which contain no mention of Objectivist activities. I proceed to donate more books to the library as I can afford them. To date, I've been successful in placing a dozen books in four different libraries. I anticipate greater success in the future due to only recently discovering that there's an art to dealing with small libraries.

Another discovery: probably the book most urgently needed in library stocks is *The Voice of Reason*, first because Peikoff's "Thirty Years" memoir can address the Branden books (the first of which is showing up in libraries) and second, because the Schwartz piece on libertarianism gives the Objectivist criticism of the movement in unprecedented detail. Prior to *The Voice of Reason*, a comprehensive treatment of that position was not commonly available to the public. Add the inclusion of the box number "for further information," and you have up-to-the-minute Objectivism in a single volume. If you do any donating, your first donation should be a hardback copy of a novel the place doesn't have, along with *The Voice of Reason* to get them started on the nonfiction.

Finally, Rand has been extremely helpful in allowing me to make sense of my college philosophy courses. A good thing, because philosophy is a big help in at least one of my careers: broadcasting. Whether the mood's profound or humorous, when you flip the mike open, you have to think of something to say.



Pete Jamison

HOS STUDIES THE NEWS

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and Michael Mazzone encapsulated what was presented and what was omitted, given the context of what one would expect regarding an invasion.

Rather than focusing on the manifest efficacy of the operation, the networks applied peacetime standards of a mixed-economy city government in judging the events in Panama: after three days there still existed snipers, looting, medical shortages, and a lack of municipal services. As a substitute for honestly exploring the legitimacy of the invasion, the votes of the Organization of American States "regretting" the invasion were presented unanswered, old newsreels of the building of the Panama Canal were shown with a voice-over recounting "U.S. imperialism in this century in South America," and more than one newsman asked how President Bush would shore up public support from the American public (while simultaneously downplaying the fact that support was running 75%-90%). The MacNeil Lehrer Report presented a refreshing change from this America bashing, not because it was unbiased (the reporter, Judy Woodruff, was extremely anti-American), but because it presented a live interview with an articulate spokesman defending U.S. actions.

In discussing these news presentations, I was impressed by the sophistication and talent of audience members. Above all, members expressed the need to be wary in viewing anything on television. The comments of Pravin Shah reminded us all of the very practical need of philosophy, not only in producing news, but also in viewing it: He emphasized that even if the news from any one source on any one day is inaccurate, integration of sound philosophy with many news stories across many days and from many sources will make it possible for us as viewers to gain a balanced perspective on the events.

IS ZONING COMING TO HOUSTON?

by J. Brian Phillips

Houston is the only American city with a population of more than 100,000 without a comprehensive zoning system in place. During this century, at least four attempts have been made to bring zoning to Houston. A fifth attempt is currently in progress.

The latest push for zoning began about ten years ago, when the city passed the first of several ordinances aimed at controlling private property. In other cities, these ordinances would have been part of a comprehensive zoning ordinance. In Houston, where the public has long frowned upon zoning, these ordinances are simply a piecemeal approach implementing zoning. As is generally the case, the city has aimed its restrictions at unpopular businesses and development practices.

In 1980 City Council passed a sign ordinance restricting the size and location of billboards. Often regarded as the nation's billboard capital, the ordinance received considerable public support. Mayor Whitmire and *The Houston Post* also supported the ordinance. In the following years, City Council enacted laws restricting sexually oriented businesses and off-street parking, and greatly expanded the enforcement powers of the Houston City Planning Commission. Few people see a connection between these ordinances and zoning; they see no connection between concrete examples of the principle which underlies zoning. It is this blindness which has prepared the city for zoning.

In late January, City Councilman Jim Greenwood announced the formation of an *ad hoc* committee to study the zoning issue. At the same time, City Planning Director Patricia Knudson said she would be considering zoning in the near future. Several of the city's developers quickly jumped on the zoning bandwagon. Most Councilmembers have endorsed zoning to some degree. *The Houston Post*, which has been pushing for zoning since the 1920's, has been heavily propogandizing for it.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

MARCH	APRIL	MAY	JUNE
3- Montessori Video 11- Fiction-Writing 23- HOS Meeting	21- San Jacinto Day	HOS Meeting 28- Memorial Day	21- Summer begins

IS ZONING COMING TO HOUSTON?

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The advocates of zoning have momentum on their side. The principle of controls on private property has been readily accepted. Those who have previously opposed zoning- developers, real estate brokers, and the city's older residential areas- are now largely in favor of zoning. Politicians, who have previously shunned zoning like the plague, are now stumbling over one another to endorse it.

To date, pro-zoning forces have yet to encounter any substantial opposition. They are operating in an intellectual vacuum. Their victims- such as the billboard industry- have engaged in appeasement and capitulation. The advocates of zoning have yet to face a principled defense of property rights. That is about to change.

HOS announces the formation of the Ad Hoc Committee for the Defense of Property Rights. The committee is currently drafting a position paper which will set forth a principled defense of property and address the specific arguments raised by the advocates of zoning. A copy of this paper will be sent to all HOS members.

The debate over zoning promises to continue for some time (some are predicting a referendum in 1991). We must begin conveying our message to the public- through letters-to-the-editor, Op/Ed articles, talks to civic and business groups, etc. This is an excellent opportunity for HOS to present the principle of individual rights to Houstonians.

UH STUDENT GROUP

The University of Houston Students of Objectivism will meet on March 14 at 7:00 pm in the Cascade Room of the Student Center.

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