

THE HOUSTON OBJECTIVISM SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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OBSTACLES TO CONFIDENCE IN OBJECTIVISM

The next HOS meeting will be held on May 18 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 be presented by Dwyane Hicks. The title of his presentation is "Obstacles to Confidence in Objectivism (And How to Overcome Them)".

Based on 24 years of experience, Dwyane will examine obstacles in learning Objectivism and having confidence in its application. He will address influences both familiar and unfamiliar to Objectivism. Dwyane will also offer advice on overcoming these obstacles.

IOE STUDY GROUP

Kirk Mashue is trying to organize an epistemology study group. The group will use the new *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology* book as a guide. Anyone interested in more information regarding the study group should contact Kirk at 784-6539.

HOS MEMBERS DISCUSS MEDICAL ETHICS

Nineteen HOS members and guests attended a roundtable discussion on medical ethics on March 30. Led by Brian Phillips, the discussion demonstrated the tremendous impact medical science has on our lives, as well as the dynamic nature of ethical principles. As human knowledge expands, new types of human relationships result, requiring the continuous application of ethical principles. Few areas of human life illustrate this better than medicine.

The first topics discussed were the rationality of desiring a child of a particular sex, and the morality of using abortion for the purpose of sex selection. It was generally agreed that, in some contexts, desiring a child of a particular sex is perfectly rational. In an agricultural society, for example, the desire for a boy (to help with farm-work) would be rational. There was some disagreement on the use of abortion for the purpose of sex selection. Several people believed that in today's culture, the desire for a child of a particular sex is harder to rationally justify, and therefore, abortion shouldn't be used for sex selection. It was pointed out that a couple's entire conception of parenthood might revolve around a child of a particular sex, and having a child of the other sex might represent a clash of values.

The second topic discussed involved the responsibility of a pregnant woman to her "unborn child". The case of a Wyoming woman arrested for being drunk while pregnant was cited. The woman had previously given birth to a child suffering from fetal alcohol syndrome and was under a court order to refrain from consuming alcohol while pregnant. It was concluded that the court has a legitimate right to place such restrictions on pregnant women, and such actions as getting drunk, or smoking crack cocaine while pregnant are criminal actions. By continuing her pregnancy, a woman implicitly decides to give birth, i.e., to bring an individual into the world. In that state, a woman has an obligation to avoid any volitional action which can be objectively demonstrated to threaten the physical or mental health of that individual.

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PROFILE- ANNA FRANCO

Throughout high school, I had thoughts and questions on every branch of philosophy. I was confused and wanted to know: How can some of the students in my class "prove that nothing is real? Why do so many classmates need the support of others to do anything or think anything? Why is communism bad if it is the only political system with a full philosophy backing it up?

To find the answers to my questions, I decided to study philosophy. We had studied Plato and Descartes in class, but I couldn't accept their philosophies. Plato's ideas are fantasy, and I couldn't see where he got them; Descartes started off by doubting nearly everything except God, whereas I was sure of many things, including that God doesn't exist.

I kept searching among other authors and philosophers until one day I saw someone reading *The Virtue of Selfishness*. The title intrigued me because I had recently decided selfishness was morally good, but I wasn't always sure how the concept should be applied to my life. The guy reading the book suggested that I read *The Fountainhead*. When I did, I realized that I had struck it rich. Rand was so clear and thorough-- she gave me a greater understanding and appreciation of my own good ideas and an unanswerable attack on my bad ideas.

In the same month that I discovered Rand, I was also accepted to MIT. There, I majored in planetary science because I was fascinated with space exploration. I spent two summers teaching astronomy to children, and a third working on a space research project under a NASA grant. I also continued to study Objectivism, and in my sophomore year, became the chairman of the MIT Objectivism Study Group.

After I graduated in 1987, I came to Houston to study for an MBA at Rice University. I chose Houston because it is home to several small entrepreneurial space companies, and I hoped to get a job with one of them. In the past three years the private space industry has made minimal progress. I am much more pessimistic about the industry and am considering other careers. Since my graduation from Rice in May 1989, I have been working in the Information Systems Division at Conoco. My other interests include: philosophy, history of science, music and business.

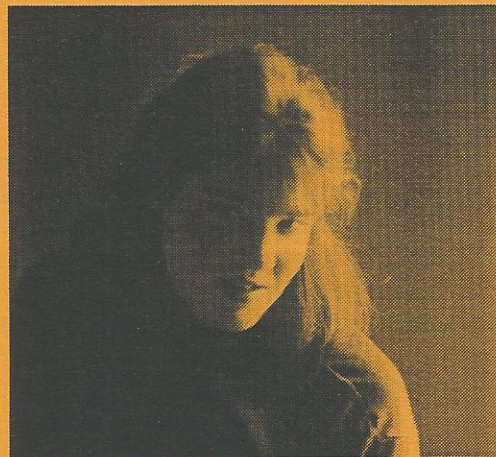
It has been seven years since I found Ayn Rand, and my life has been better for it. For instance:

I used the principle of egoism to decide not to contribute to my company's United Way campaign and to defend my action to my boss, who lectured me for forty minutes on "team effort" and "public good". My alternatives might have been to contribute unwillingly, and thereby betray my values, or to not contribute and feel guilty in the presence of my boss.

I use the principles of the benevolent universe and the Law of Causality every time something bad happens to me: I find the cause so that I can prevent it from happening again. My alternative would be to continuously suffer pain and sink into depression.

I use the Objectivist ethics and epistemology to carefully judge people by continuously integrating their ideas and actions. My alternatives would be to a) shut out potential friends on the basis of surface information, or b) continue to trust "friends" long after they've betrayed values important to me.

These are just a few examples. I expect many other applications of Objectivism to improve my life in the future. Philosophy, specifically Objectivism, keeps me young. It reminds me of what is important in life; it also reminds me that I only have one life. This gives me the courage and the motivation to make the most of it.



Anna Franco

TIME FOR A EUROPEAN CONSTITUTION?

by Yaromir Steiner

Last year was the bicentennial of the French Revolution and the enactment of the United States Constitution. Both events were the culmination of centuries of intellectual struggle to free man from medieval mysticism and to establish that every man has inalienable individual rights that can be exercised without anyone's (including a government's) permission, and that within the sphere of his rights, man has absolute freedom.

The United States, unimpeded by past history or tradition, had the privilege to become the first political system based exclusively on those philosophical principles. The following quotes from Ayn Rand, the American philosopher, summarized well the idea:

America's founding idea was the principle of individual rights.... The rest... the principle of political freedom... its economic implementation: the system of capitalism... are the logical consequence of fidelity to that one principle.

All previous systems had held that man's life belongs to society... that any freedom he enjoys is his only by favor, by the permission of society, which may be revoked at any time. The United States held that a man's life is his by right... that a right is the property of the individual, that society as such has no rights, and that the only moral purpose of a government is the protection of individual rights.

Although generated in Europe, the principle of individual rights could not be applied as easily in the European nations restrained by cultural, political, historical and religious traditions. This explains why the French Revolution degenerated into The Terror and then the Napoleonic despotism. Two centuries and numerous wars later, half of Europe is a freer place to live but still encumbered by constitutions which, in line with the monarchic tradition, place the state and the collective above the individual. Even in France, the country of Montesquieu and the Revolution, the separation of the Executive and Legislative branches

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MEDICAL ETHICS

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Euthanasia was the final topic discussed. As a corollary to an individual's right to his own life, an individual should have the right to end his life. Several individuals expressed the need to consider the mental state of the individual wishing to die. For example, if a person is in extreme, but temporary pain, a doctor should not submit to the individual's wish to die. The issue of euthanasia is complicated when an individual is incapable of expressing his desires, e.g., he is comatose. There are currently many safeguards in common law to prevent the hasty and indiscriminate use of euthanasia in such cases. Usually, a guardian is appointed to determine the best interest of the patient, much as a guardian is appointed in insanity hearings. Dr. Julie Moy, a guest at the meeting, stated that doctors are frightened of this issue, because they are operating in a legal vacuum. She cited an instance in which a colleague spent a day before a District Attorney answering questions regarding the death of a patient. The interrogation was a direct result of this legal vacuum. Laws are needed to protect the rights of both the patient and the doctor.

The meeting was very intellectually stimulating. The presence of Dr. Moy, who practices family medicine, provided both technical knowledge and the insights of a medical professional.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST
18- HOS Meeting 28- Memorial Day	21- Summer begins	1- TOS Deadline <i>Fountainhead</i> Dinner	Dog Days of Summer

TIME FOR A EUROPEAN CONSTITUTION?

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is less than clear, the independence of the Judiciary from the Executive sometimes (Tribunaux Administratifs) questionable and the "Raison d'Etat" is still used regularly and legally to abuse individual rights.

The present heated brainstorming for the creation of a frontier-free Europe represents a unique opportunity to reflect on the promotion of individual rights in Europe. We can let Europe be just a "pooling of sovereignty" and "a common social and currency area" where the present states will delegate some of their powers to a new layer of bureaucracy. This new level of government, more centralized and further away from the citizens, can only become a bigger risk for individual rights. On the other hand we can seize the move toward a United Europe as an opportunity to roll back the frontiers of the state and further individual political and economic freedom.

A major step in that direction could be the adoption of a Constitutional Declaration establishing the primacy of individual rights and the basis for a future European constitution. This future constitution could provide for a clear separation of powers and, like its American counterpart, become a limitation on the government, not on private individuals, and a charter for the protection of individuals against their government.

In Europe, there has been a lapse in the march toward individual freedom started during the Age of Enlightenment. Moreover the eastern half of Europe lives in a state of quasi-slavery. Frontier-free Europe represents an opportunity to resume the march toward individual rights, freedom and capitalism.

(This article is a modified version of an article originally published in *French-American Commerce*, the newsletter of the French-American Chamber of Commerce- Houston Chapter. Yaromir Steiner, a member of HOS, is President of ConstructaProperties Inc.)

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