Houston Objectivism Society

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Music Workshop at May Meeting

Anna Franco will present a continuation of her music workshop which was a big hit at last November's Texas Objectivist Societies Conference in Houston. A short review of the previous workshop will be followed by a more in depth presentation of Deryck Cooke's aesthetic theory of music.

Unlike most modern aesthetic theorists, Cooke holds that a piece of music refers to something in reality beyond the specific musical elements of which it is composed. He believes that a language of music does exist and that it is possible to someday understand what a piece means. In his book *The Language of Music*, Cooke starts by associating certain musical phrases with certain emotions. This is the first step in applying science to music, i.e., applying the law of identity.

The meeting will take place at 7:30 pm, Friday, May 31 at the Wallingford Apartments club house at 2750 Wallingford Drive. Wallingford intersects Westheimer two blocks west of Sam Houston beltway(8), in front of a Ninfa's mexican restaurant. The club house is approximately one block south of Westheimer on the west side of Wallingford.

Warren Ross to Host New Course on Objectivism

This summer, Warren will host Dr. Leonard Peikoff's new course, *Objectivism: the Philosophy of Ayn Rand*, based on his book which will be released this Fall. Registrants will receive the first five chapters of Dr. Peikoff's book and hear a series of nine taped seminars. More information is provided in the blue insert accompanying this newsletter.

Ludwig von Mises Institute Opens Local Chapter

Last month, Warren Ross and Dwyane Hicks attended a meeting of the von Mises Institute in Houston. Founders Kevin Duffy and Christopher Scott presented a brief history of taxation in the United States and led discussion concerning the effects of high taxation. Warren was graciously allowed to introduce the members to our organization.

Warren pointed out that von Mises applied the law of causality to the issue of man's production. In doing so, von Mises proved that the free market was *the* means of maximizing man's welfare and that any degree of regulation led inexorably to further controls. In addition, von Mises showed that economic freedom and political freedom are mutually reinforcing. But, Warren asked, who will validate the premises upon which von Mises' work depends? Any science depends on causality, proof and logic depend on a validation of reason and the issue of man's welfare depends on a validation of egoism. These are the fundamentals which Ayn Rand validated, and their acceptance ultimately determines the fate of science and the status of a culture. Von Mises is reputed to have called Ayn Rand one of the bravest "men" in history. Whether or not the remark is accurate, its substance reflects on von Mises' insight and Rand's achievement.

The next meeting will focus on the environmentalism movement, and new faces are welcome: 8 pm, Tuesday, May 21 **or** (your choice) 8 pm, Wednesday, May 22 at the Eagle Creek clubhouse at 3000 Woodland Park Drive(just a few blocks west of Wallingford Apartments). RSVP: Kevin Duffy at 493-1728.

Anna Franco to Host Study Group on *The Romantic Manifesto*

In early June, Anna will host a study group on Ayn Rand's *The Romantic Manifesto*. The group will meet Sunday afternoons, and participants should call Anna at 781-3609 for further details.

The format will follow that of last summer's study group on *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, hosted by Gregg Gerlach, where a different participant presented and led discussion on each chapter. I found this method to be very productive last summer, even though I had already studied *IOE*.

March Meeting Focuses on Activism

Our last HOS meeting, at the University of Houston Student Center, featured presentations by three Houston Objectivists, who have found their careers and Objectivism to be mutually supportive: Where philosophy serves to integrate ones goals, personal and private, ones expertise can serve as authority to promulgate ones values. Richard Beals, an electrical engineer, spoke on "Combatting Collectivist Interpretation of Teamwork in a Big Corporation." Michael Mazzone, an attorney, addressed "Stopping Mandatory Pro Bono in the Legal Profession." Finally, Joe Blackburn, an eminent Houston businessman, spoke on "Trying to Stop the Spread of Medicaid to Optometry."

Richard Beals' project began with the arrival of a manual at work entitled Quality Improvement Program, written

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by hired consultants. Richard found many of the unstated premises involved in the analysis of problems related to teamwork much more harmful than any problem addressed. Among other things, human action was explained only in terms of instinctual animal behavior, without any reference to reason; group interests were held to be inherently in conflict with individual interests; all accomplishments were seen to be the product of teams; individualism was equated with whim-worship, without any link to reason, and sacrifice for the team was viewed as an axiomatic good.

Perhaps the worst aspect was the manner in which such "truths" were "proven". For example, at one point in an associated presentation for an audience, playing cards were displayed too quickly to be identified on a screen. Participants were asked to identify them, only to be shown later that the cards included a black three of hearts. From this, the explicitly stated message was that we are all blinded by our previous experience.

Richard decided not only to challenge the views presented but their underlying premises and the shoddy fallacies used to manipulate the audience and reader. He wrote a well documented and reasoned letter explaining the former as well as identifying the harm of collectivist and altruist ideas. In addition, he took the responsibility of outlining alternative policy based on rational views. Richard sent his letter to pertinent superiors, and the response continues to be quite favorable.

Michael Mazzone, an attorney, was next to take the floor. He showed us how he fought the issue of Mandatory Pro Bono in Texas, distributing his excellent article "Mandatory Pro Bono: Slavery in Disguise" from the October 22, 1990 issue of *Texas Lawyer.*

Michael also prepared an outline detailing steps to be taken in any responsible advocacy. These steps included identifying your issue, evaluating supportive literature, using the power of a proper moral argument and identify the nature and context of your audience. (Michael Mazzone will be featured in a legal symposium at the Thomas Jefferson School in San Diego this summer. See more under *Announcements.*)

Finally, Joe Blackburn described his active opposition to Medicare in the field of optometry and eye health care in general. First we were presented with a brief history of the growth of Medicare. Since its inception in 1965, it has grown to the extent that 50% of all hospital entries are now under the auspices of Medicare. Joe pointed out, however, that we are far from impotent in this matter, giving the example of Salvatore Durante of the Objectivist Health Care Professionals, who successfully fought to keep Medicare out of dentistry.

Although there is increasing pressure for "nationalized" health care, Joe pointed out that professional publications are eager to publish alternative viewpoints. He also provided us with a striking example of the innovation which is lost when government "services" replace private endeavors: A few years ago, Joe originated the idea of an optometry office and lab together, providing glasses for customers in one hour. His Eye+Tech was later purchased by Pearl Express. Today such service is commonplace and taken for granted, but one can be sure that had the industry been government owned at the time, such service would have been regarded as fanciful and perhaps a waste of resources--and this is assuming that anyone would have been motivated to come up with the idea.

It may be instructive to examine not only what Richard, Michael and Joe are doing but also their *principled* approach. One cannot achieve any purpose mindlessly--from delivering a letter to pursuing a career, much less influencing long-term political change. Accordingly, one cannot randomly pick arguments for one's positions. False reasoning for a proper position disarms not one's opponent but one's own cause. Michael, for example, focussed on man's right to his own life--abdicating one's life is not a moral ideal even if done voluntarily. What he did not do, in the typically Conservative mode, was concede the primary premise of altruism as idealistic while quibbling over voluntary or coercive means. (In this way, liberals have been handed the moral high ground for years.)

Likewise, it does nothing but harm to assert that any philosophy or set of ideas will do in supporting freedom. Not only is this obviously false from experience(witness the Ayatollah), but the lack of a consistent set of values to support freedom results in the exponent's arguments becoming mere sophistry. In short order, he is reduced to carrying placards with meaningless slogans, and his would-be listeners see him as a kook and his cause as embarrassing.

Book Review

by
Warren Ross

Wilbur and Orville,
A Biography of the Wright Brothers;
Fred Howard;
Ballantine Books, pb, 1987, 530 pages, with index.

Here's a quiz on your knowledge of the history of flight, specifically on your knowledge of the accomplishments of the Wright brothers:
1. Were the Wright brothers just bicycle mechanics, were they engineers, or were they scientists?
2. Were the Wright brothers illiterate, moderately educated or well educated?
3. As a consequence of their efforts, did the Wright brothers gain no wealth, a moderate degree of wealth or a fortune?

The answer to these and many other interesting questions are presented in this excellent biography of the two brothers. In brief, the answers are:
1. The Wright brothers were definitely scientists and not just engineers or bicycle mechanics.
2. Although the Wright brothers had no more than a high school formal education, they were self-educated to a much higher level.
3. Both earned large fortunes.

The essential value of this book is that it refutes many misinterpretations about the Wrights, and it clearly identifies the relationship between scientific knowledge and successful invention. A

mystique has developed about the Wright brothers over the last 80 years that portrays them as backyard tinkerers who by sheer determination invented the airplane. Writers have emphasized how little formal education the Wrights had, implying that there is such a thing as too much knowledge of a field. These writers express an almost satisfied enjoyment of the idea that semi-educated bicycle mechanics were capable of inventing the airplane whereas the most highly trained aeronautics engineers said it was impossible. Others see the Wright brothers as the lone inventors, competing against the large corporations and the government, and winning the battle despite their lack of resources. (*Fire of Genius*, a book about inventors, places strong emphasis on how little money the Wrights spent building their airplane.)

Neither of these interpretations is accurate. Wilbur and Orville essentially began with a passion to solve one particular problem, the problem of heavier-than-air flight. They became scientists, with all the erudition that name implies, because of the nature of the problem they had to solve and the requirements -- in terms of reading scientific literature, experimental verification, and theory development -- of solving it. For example, beginning in 1896, Wilbur and Orville read everything that they could obtain on the nature of flight, including the works of pioneers like Langley, Chanute and Lillienthal. They even read books on animal mechanisms in order to understand the principles of bird flight. They taught themselves French and German in the evenings so that they could read foreign books and aeronautics journals, not wanting to be restricted in the solution of their problem to only what was published in English. In the most fundamental sense, the brothers were self-educated. They were purposeful men who acquired the knowledge and skills they saw were necessary for their chosen task.

Contributions to Aeronautics

The brothers found when they began examining the literature in aeronautics that only inaccurate tables existed about the relationship between the lift on a wing, the air speed over the wing and the wing's shape. Thus they had to develop the fundamentals of the science describing the lifting power of a wing. They developed this science from the starting place of all science: observation. They built their own wind tunnel and made their own scale models of wings, measuring the relationships between the above-mentioned variables. Wilbur ultimately published two scientific papers, one of which was on the brothers' measurements of lifting surfaces.

Once they understood the physics of lifting surfaces, Wilbur and Orville needed a propeller to move a vehicle at a speed high enough to lift it off the ground. Yet the theory of propellers was inadequate, limited to the theory of the propulsion of screws on a ship, which was not equivalent to the propeller in air because of the large differences in viscosity between water and air. The brothers not only developed their own theory of how a propeller works in air, but also built their own propellers and perfected their design over many years.

Their essential contribution to the problem of flight, the contribution for which they obtained their main patent, was in the area of control. They were the first to recognize that when a heavier-than-air body was in flight a fullproof method of three-dimensional control was mandatory. Neither earlier experimenters in gliding nor later workers in the field of heavier-than-air flight had satisfactory mechanisms to control aircraft. Hence once their crafts were in the air, they were at the disposal of the wind, with all of its uncertainties in speed and direction. By critical reading of the work of their predecessors, the Wright brothers identified early that control was the "missing link" in powered flight, and made that the problem they chose to solve. Wilbur's famous "wingwarping" idea (1899) was the result of their multi-year effort.

Everyone knows of the Wright brothers' implementation of their knowledge in their flight trials and ultimate success at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. Kitty Hawk was not in the Wrights' backyard, but rather a grueling week-long journey by train, cart and boat from the Wright home in Ohio. The months of annual experiments at Kitty Hawk required the Wright brothers to risk their modest earnings from the bicycle shop on physically dangerous and uncertain trials that demanded careful planning, perseverance and courage to execute. But it was a courage undergirded by a firm certainty about the scientific principles that would make a successful airplane possible.

"The Progressive" Response

For all of these achievements, what rewards did the Wright brothers receive? When they tried to enforce their patent, they were vilified as "mercenary" and "commercial" by those Progressive-era mentalities who thought that their invention should just be given away freely to everyone, without providing material advantage to the Wrights. Their right to their patent was challenged by a competitor, Glenn Curtiss, using all the standard tricks. They were accused of stealing ideas from their long-term correspondent, Gustave Chanute. They were accused of having patented something unoriginal: "The aeroplane would ... appear to be the sudden outgrowth of fertile and mature conditions, rather than the product of uncommon originality," one writer said. Others accused the Wright brothers of just having been lucky.

Fortunately, the brothers were immune to this moral attack. They vigorously defended their patent in the U.S. and in many European countries. Wilbur himself wrote a series of articles that were an articulate defense of the brothers' accomplishments and their place in the history of flight. He explained that contrary to the airplane being an "outgrowth of fertile and mature conditions" it would have been many years before others had flown if it had not been for him and Orville's efforts (which was why they were not afraid, during the years of their interminable negotiations with companies for the rights to manufacture the Wright plane, of anyone "catching up"). Nor was their invention luck. "It is the complexity of the flying problem that makes it so difficult," Wilbur explained. "It is not to be solved by stumbling upon a secret, but by the patient accumulation of information upon a hundred different points." Despite setbacks,

the brothers eventually won all of their infringement suits. The courts required the many users of their invention who had infringed the patent over the years to pay the Wright brothers back royalties.

As a consequence, the Wright brothers became very wealthy. Wilbur, who died prematurely in 1912, left an estate of $277,000. Orville, who died in 1948, left an estate of $1 million. Both of these estates would be worth more than $2 million in today's dollars.

Wilbur and Orville was a pleasure to read because the Wright brothers were fascinating men, inspiring integrations of the scientist, the engineer and the businessman. Fred Howard portrays them admiringly as single-minded in their attack on the flying problem. Howard is not only an admirer of the brothers but a scholar who, as an aeronautics librarian at the Library of Congress, had unique access to the Wright brothers' papers, which he edited for publication. In writing this biography, Howard actually studied the Wright brothers' original wind tunnel and propeller data. For its factual completeness, and its superb illustration of the relationship between scientific knowledge and wealth, *Wilbur and Orville* is more than a biography of the Wrights: It is a demonstration that success comes not only from "perspiration" and "inspiration" (to use Edison's words), nor even from "education" in the formal sense, but essentially from *conceptualization* of the fundamentals of a problem.

TO THE EDITOR: [Chronicle]

Texas should finance its schools the same successful way it finances food, shoes and automobiles--by releasing the consumer's judgment in the purchase of education. The problems of socialized education are common to all socialized products: forced payment for shoddy services, indifference to consumer needs, lack of reward to superior providers of service and a bureaucracy whose main focus is its own benefits unconnected to product quality.

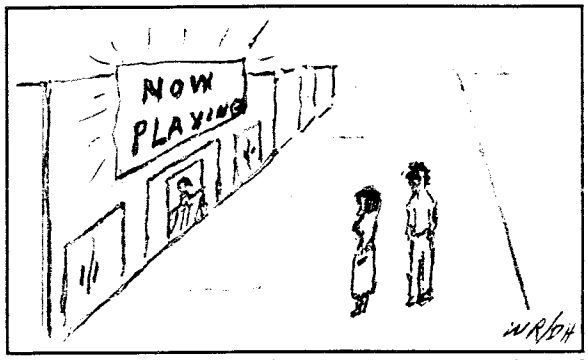
In a free market of education, not only would parents demand quality for their dollars spent, the burden of many important issues would evaporate: integration and forced busing, religion in state schools, the focus on extracurricular activities and student motivation and discipline.

Lastly, the least appropriate institution in our society to provide us a view of the proper role of government is government itself.

Dwyane Hicks

Announcements

- Please send any letters-to-the-editor you get published to us for publishing here.
- The Thomas Jefferson School takes place August 4-18. At least three Houstonians are attending. Included in its announcement is the following: "The Jefferson School has been created to advance and disseminate the philosophical and scientific knowledge that is necessary to the existence of a free society. Accordingly, the School's primary mission is the further development, application, and teaching of the ideas of the pro-reason, pro-individualist philosophers and the pro-freedom, pro-capitalist economists, and of compatible ideas in the field of psychology. All of its activities and programs feature the relevant doctrines of Objectivist and Aristotelian philosophy and of "Austrian" and Classical economics." The President of the School is Dr. George Reisman, an economist who studied with Ludwig von Mises.
- Submissions to this newsletter are welcome.
- The helm is changing for Students of Objectivism at the University of Houston. Anna Franco is becoming president with the departure of Kirk Mashue due to completion of studies. Anna has chaired three clubs: at MIT, Rice and now at U of H. Thanks, Kirk and thanks, Anna.



So, ya' wanna' go in and concretize our metaphysical value judgments?

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