



Houston Objectivism Society

Vol.5, No. 2 May 1992 Newsletter

Letter Writing at May Meeting

The next meeting will feature a workshop on how to write letters to the editor. Brian Phillips will conduct the workshop.

Some of the week's newspapers will be brought in order to examine current topics. The immediate goal for the evening will be a letter written by each attendee to a newspaper or legislator.

The meeting will take place at a different time than usual: Saturday, 6:00 pm, May 30 at the apartment clubhouse of Brian & Dawn Phillips. For the location, consult the map enclosed for the OPAR study group.

March Meeting Features Hugo's *The Man Who Laughs*

The last HOS meeting featured dramatic readings from what Ayn Rand called Hugo's greatest novel, *The Man Who Laughs*.

Chris Land read the description of Clancharlie, the Peer of England, whose integrity requires him to renounce his estates rather than swear allegiance to the restored monarchy after Cromwell. Anna Franco read the description of Gwynplaine and Dea, the tender lovers bound to each other by the fact that, although he is horribly disfigured, she is blind and cannot see his face, only his soul. Dawn Phillips read the description of Josiana, the bored courtesan who looks for adventure by chasing after Gwynplaine. Brian Phillips read the description of Barkilphedro, the evil manipulator who discovers that Gwynplaine is the son of Clancharlie and hence the rightful heir to the Clancharlie estates...and the betrothed of Josiana.

The readings were followed by an enthusiastic discussion of the characters and their motives, and we thank Patricia LeChevalier of Atlean Press for

allowing us to perform the readings.

Reisman Speaks at University of Houston



Dr. Reisman with Joe Burwell in background.

Joe Burwell, President of Students of Objectivism at University of Houston, introduced Dr. George Reisman to approximately 150 students at the business school's Melcher Hall on April 16th. Dr. Reisman spoke on "The Toxicity of Environmentalism" for over an hour, followed by forty five minutes of answering questions from the audience. This was one of many speeches that Dr. Reisman made during a tour which also took him to the University of Michigan, Oklahoma State University and University of Texas.

Audience reaction was generally positive, although a few environmentalists predictably dominated the question period with questions and charges which demonstrated their inability or unwillingness to follow the content of the speech. Dr. Reisman, however, demonstrated his remarkable rhetorical abilities, in large part by taking seriously the questions asked, many of which were meant to be rhetorical only.

The Ayn Rand Institute provided numerous pamphlets for the audience, and many copies of Dr. Reisman's

speech were sold. Although these pamphlets are of secondary importance at the time of such events, I believe they are very important in reaching the right audience with the Objectivist message.

All in all, Dr. Reisman provided us with an exciting afternoon, and the audience was treated with what students rarely receive from a professor: a powerfully reasoned and integrated examination of a crucial issue.

We would like to express our appreciation to Dr. Reisman and to Joe Burwell and Anna Franco for making this such a successful occasion. Thanks also to Jeri Eagan for supervising the pamphlet table and for our photo.

Leonard Peikoff Speaks at Ford Hall Forum

by
Bennett Karp

An exciting Objectivist weekend in Boston April 25-26 was highlighted by a lecture from Dr. Leonard Peikoff to the Ford Hall Forum on the topic "Some Notes About Tomorrow: The Future Implications of Certain Present Trends at Home and Abroad." In a theme somewhat reminiscent of his book *The Ominous Parallels*, Dr. Peikoff made some frightening comparisons between two major events of the day: the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and the American-Japanese trade relationship. Along with an insightful explanation as to why communism by its nature could not sustain itself in power, Dr. Peikoff explained that the ideas that are strongly present in Russia and that underlie the call for protectionism here in the U.S. are: nationalism and collectivism. With this ideological base, Russia has to move

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towards a statist society. The same end potentially awaits us. It is philosophic fundamentals that determine a culture's direction.

What can one do, Dr. Peikoff asked rhetorically in closing. The answer, of course, is to fight for the right philosophic ideas. But Dr. Peikoff also offered a short-term, political recommendation: vote this November for the *Democratic* candidate--whoever he is. George Bush, Dr. Peikoff explained, poses as a conservative and then picks out only the worst elements of that ideology. He has capitulated on every important issue--on taxes, civil rights legislation, Israel, aid to Russia. He must be voted out of office. (A "protest" vote for a third-party or independent candidate, a vote that would not help defeat Bush, was not recommended by Dr. Peikoff.) With Bush in office, the Republicans in Congress are not able to offer any meaningful opposition to the President's capitulations. And the Republican leadership needs to get the message that they can count on support only if they put forward a better candidate. Dr. Peikoff stressed that this recommendation was his own, not Objectivism's: philosophy does not choose political candidates.

This talk was Dr. Peikoff's tenth Ford Hall Forum address. Ayn Rand spoke at the Forum many times, beginning in 1961. The Forum, as Dr. Peikoff notes in his introduction to *The Voice of Reason*, is a remarkable organization in today's culture: it is honest. He quotes Miss Rand as saying of the Forum, "Since it is open to new ideas, it truly is an intellectual organization and it deserves to be supported."

The evening before Dr. Peikoff's talk, approximately one hundred people attended a dinner held by The Ayn Rand Institute to celebrate the 35th anniversary of the publication of *Atlas Shrugged*. The highlight of the evening was talks from Dr. Peikoff, Mary Ann Sures and Harry Binswanger. Dr. Peikoff spoke of *Atlas Shrugged*, past, present and future--of his own experience in reading *Atlas* in manuscript and of Miss Rand's writing of it, its continued success (U.S. sales in paperback

alone are roughly 100,000 copies per year--and that's before the 35th anniversary edition) and its future. On this last point, Dr. Peikoff said he is negotiating to have *Atlas* produced as a six hour TV miniseries. It is still a long way off, but Dr. Peikoff said that he is more optimistic than he has been in some time. Dr. Peikoff concluded with a toast "to *Atlas Shrugged*, its author and its and her immortal future."

Mrs. Sures met Ayn Rand in 1954 and worked as Miss Rand's assistant, typing the final manuscript of *Atlas*, beginning in 1956. Mrs. Sures described the extraordinary experience she had during that period. Her descriptions conveyed with remarkable clarity what it was like to work with Miss Rand and to be part of the making of the greatest novel in history. To relate just one story, Mrs. Sures described "the glorious lunch break," a discussion that Mrs. Sures said affected her life the most. Mrs. Sures (then Miss Rukavina) had in the kitchen of her apartment at that time a copper frying pan that she took pleasure in cleaning, so that it shined brightly, and in seeing it hanging on her wall. Some acquaintance had criticized Mrs. Sures for taking pleasure in such a non-intellectual activity. Upset by these remarks, Mrs. Sures asked Miss Rand if they could have discussion, which they did over lunch. Miss Rand asked Mrs. Sures a series of questions about what she liked about the frying pan. Miss Rand gradually elicited from Mrs. Sures that Mrs. Sures' pleasure came from creating for herself a clean, bright, pleasant living environment--certainly a legitimate value. This discussion, Miss Rand pointed out to Mrs. Sures, was an example of *taking ideas seriously*, of applying philosophic abstractions to the concrete events of life. This is what philosophy is all about.

Dr. Binswanger read portions of a slightly edited transcript of Ayn Rand's own comments about *Atlas Shrugged* taken from biographical interview tapes from 1960-61. In Miss Rand's own words, the attendees heard that she first got the idea for *Atlas* in 1943. After

three years of research, Miss Rand started writing on September 2, 1946 (hence the date of September 2 in the novel). Miss Rand (through Dr. Binswanger) discussed some of the early ideas for the book and the characters, how the book grew in scope (it was originally to be shorter than *The Fountainhead*) as she realized that there were additional ideas to include, and how she formulated some of her philosophic ideas during that time. One example was Ayn Rand's crucial point in ethics that life is the essential root of values, which she expressed informally at that time as "values for weeds" (i.e., the point that "value" applies to living organisms, not merely in conscious or human ones). There was a strong hint that the material in these tapes would form the basis of an authorized biography of Miss Rand.

Among the weekend's other events was a reception hosted by Second Renaissance Books the afternoon of Dr. Peikoff's lecture.

A comment: The message of Dr. Peikoff's Ford Hall Forum lecture was made ever more real three days later when rioting broke out in Los Angeles following the acquittal in the Rodney King case. The event demonstrated how deeply and widely the ideas of racism and collectivism are spreading through our culture, and how little respect remains for individual rights, for private property, and for minimal standards of law and order. Many people, though personally opposed to the rioting, nonetheless thought it justified or at least understandable. Dr. Peikoff had said that the collapse of communism occurred because the Soviet leaders and people could no longer pretend to believe the false promises of that ideology; communism had ceased to provide a moral sanction. In this country, it is the truth that is no longer believed. The Soviet leaders (unlike those of past generations) were not willing to take the steps needed to hold onto power: our leaders, sympathetic to the rioters "frustration," were not willing to enforce the law. And when the police would not or could not restore order.

where did people look for guidance? To religion. In many cities, the churches were called upon to keep people from taking to the streets. It was the clergy who provided much of the moral leadership on which the political leaders had defaulted.

The riots were a tragic and chilling demonstration of the power of philosophy. It is for Objectivism and Objectivists to show how that power can become the source for a free, productive, rational society. \$

Reaction to Dr. Reisman

The following editorial was published April 23 in "The Dailey Cougar", the newspaper for the University of Houston. Normally, my standards of publication would preclude its re-printing, but I do so here to provide context for a subsequent editorial by Joe Burwell and a letter from Matthew Smith. I'm also printing this in order to show what students have to put up with...and how small the opponent is. The editorial is written by Bredo Johnsen, the chair of the Department of Philosophy.

Reisman's Rantings a Toxic Waste of Time. Pepperdine professor brought twisted logic, suspicious views to UH

by Bredo Johnsen

"Environmentalism" that I am, I had considered going to hear Pepperdine University Professor George Reisman's attack on my kind for a couple of reasons--you never know when you'll learn something by listening to someone on the other side, and if what you hear turns out to be a distorted presentation of the facts and arguments, at least you've learned something about the opposition.

But I didn't[go to the speech], and judging from your writer's account of the session, it was a wise decision.

To begin with, unless one has a lot of excess time one wants to just throw away, it's a good idea to walk out on

almost anyone who regards the Nazis and/or communists as a useful comparison group, regardless of who is under attack.

But it may be an even better idea not to waste your time with someone so lame-brained as to say "The doctrine of the intrinsic value of nature is nothing but a negation of the doctrine of human value."

Does anybody out there pretend to understand this? Does it suggest (by analogy) that the doctrine that good sex has intrinsic value is a negation of the doctrine of the value of ice cream? If I value sex, do I have to hate ice cream? Oh, lovely.

In general, is it the idea that there can only be one thing that has any intrinsic value at all, and by God, that had better be human beings? Even lovelier. And if all and only human beings have intrinsic value, does that mean the more, the merrier?

Yes, it does (it has to, if it's going to mean anything at all), though perhaps, the good professor would hasten to add (inconsistently, but hey, so what?) that human happiness is what's important, not just the existence of more and more human beings.

But now, what if it turns out that one of the things that tends to produce human happiness is a more or less natural, i.e., non-humanely-manufactured, environment? You can guess the next step, right?

Poor Dr. Reisman, chugging along in his ideological straightjacket, is no doubt clever enough to realize that what he really, really meant to say is that what counts is the happiness of right-minded people, not perverted nature-lovers, Nazis and communists--perhaps you weren't paying attention. Etc., etc., etc., ad nauseum.

Returning briefly to my cautionary catalog, watch out for people who refer to scientists who disagree with them as "alleged scientists," especially when their own credentials suggest that what they're qualified to classify are economists and alleged economists, or whatever, and not (natural) scientists at all.

Not that it isn't sometimes reasonable for the rest of us (i.e. non-scientists) to dispute policies based on scien-

tific findings, but there's only one respectable way to do that--find out what the findings are, and try to understand the arguments on both sides, taking those findings into account.

Incidentally, don't let yourself be bowled over by credentials, either, including the "Doctor" title; as an early mentor of mine once said, no doubt with his own Reismans in mind, "Doctor, schmactor"--not particularly original, perhaps, but right on the money.

Finally, Professor Reisman suggests that if he's wrong about the temporariness of the hole in the ozone layer, we should just wear more suntan lotion, and if we overheat the earth, we should just turn up the air conditioners.

While we're at it, why don't we just dump our nuclear and other toxic waste in the great, worthless outdoors, and walk around in lead suits, plus whatever else we may need to protect our intrinsically valuable selves? Oh, enough already. Poor Pepperdine.

The following response by Joe Burwell was printed April 28. Brackets enclose words dropped by "The Cougar", and the title is by "The Cougar".

Environmentalists Anti-human, Nonscientific. Critics of objectivism must learn nature not valuable in and of itself.

by Joe Burwell

I was appalled by the ridiculous editorial on April 23 ("Reisman's rantings a toxic waste of time") by Professor Bredo Johnsen, chair of the UH Department of Philosophy, who did not attend "The Toxicity of Environmentalism" event on April 16, which he lambasted.

Johnsen implies that Dr. Reisman created "a distorted presentation of the facts and arguments." Supported by citations and quotations Johnsen did not hear, Dr. Reisman actually presented the distorted facts and arguments used by the environmentalists with which Johnsen associates himself.

To begin with, it's a good idea to walk out on any of Johnsen's own philosophy classes since he does not regard "the Nazis and/or communists as a useful comparison group, regardless of who is under attack."

I presume that Johnsen regards David Duke, the past or present version, as an isolated individual who is not motivated (and not motivating others) by the same ideas that created the Weimar Republic. Millions of people compromised with and did not take seriously the philosophy promulgated by the Nazi leaders.

Johnsen inexcusably dismisses Nazis and Communists as unworthy of discussion, possibly because of his guilt in holding similar anti-individualist, anti-capitalist and anti-reason premises.

Associating with environmentalism in a common cause is the same error of compromise because environmentalist leaders promote anti-human values. One reason for having the event was to educate people that *some* environmentalists are motivated by the anti-human doctrine of intrinsic value, which is toxic on the level of parts per hundred and is much more dangerous than the pseudo-threat of global warming.

Nature is not valuable in and of itself. If Johnsen cannot understand this, maybe he should give up his professorship. At least he should have known more than to suggest a faulty, imbecilic analogy to sex and ice cream.

Some environmentalists regard [the destruction of man as an appropriate response to] the "destruction of the intrinsic value of Mother Earth." Perhaps Johnsen has never heard of Earth First! members decrying the evils of VCRs. To see the infiltration of the toxicity of such ideas, Johnsen should read the U.S. Supreme Court case which "saved" the snail darter, *Tennessee Valley Authority v. Hill*, 98 S. Ct. 2279 (1978), or the absurd dissenting opinion of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Douglas in *Sierra Club v. Morton*, 405 U.S. 727 (1972).

Contrary to Johnsen, Dr. Reisman referred to certain researchers as "alleged scientists" because statistical variations in sampling are not a substitute for principled investigations into

causality. He did not call them "alleged scientists" merely because of disagreement and then dismiss them. It is Johnsen who is in an ideological straight-jacket.

[The Greens are not concerned with human well-being. If so, then the Greens would promote the philosophy of Objectivism and pro-capitalist economics in which individuals are free to produce and trade with others.] If someone pollutes another's property, then one can obtain damages through a legal system based upon justice and the individual's right to property. Instead, the Greens want a society promoting distributive justice in which individuals keep what society does not distribute to others, and an individual must pass through a complex system of government regulation that assumes a person is guilty of harmful action before taking any action at all.

Contrary to Johnsen, it was an unwise decision not to attend, for if Dr. Reisman could not convince Johnsen of the error of identifying oneself as an environmentalist, then he would have learned at least one thing: Copies of Dr. Reisman's speech were available. Johnsen could have written an editorial based on the whole context of Dr. Reisman's speech.

Instead, Johnsen relied on a few quotes from the Cougar's pro-environmentalist review of the speech. If he can perform such a hatchet job on Reisman's logical, rational argument, one should be suspect of the quality of "Schmoctor" Johnsen's academic research. Poor University of Houston.

On April 30, a letter was printed, written by Matthew Smith, a sophomore in mechanical engineering:

...I saw nothing out of the ordinary in Bredo Johnsen's article; in fact, such tripe belongs in a concrete-bound, anti-intellectual, anti-rational rag like The Daily Cougar.

My amazement arose from the fact that Johnsen is the chair of the philosophy department. With wise men like these, who needs fools?

I would expect that Dr. Johnsen,

the individual in charge of teaching epistemology and logic on this campus, would be more responsible than to draw conclusions based solely on a few out-of-context quotes from The Daily Cougar.

Did Dr. Johnsen earn his Ph.D in philosophy without ever taking a course in Aristotelian logic, or did he simply forget it all through years of teaching the garbage that passes for philosophy today? Did he never learn that a syllogism requires *two* premises?

No, Dr. Johnsen, the intrinsic values of sex and ice cream are not causally linked, nor is that relationship implied by the causal relationship between the intrinsic value of nature and human value. What is the second premise? That nature equals sex and humans equal ice cream?

No, Dr. Reisman does not advocate the dumping of sewage into water supplies, nor does he, to the best of my knowledge, eat babies for breakfast, as Dr. Johnsen might have us believe.

In fact, Reisman believes that if one "pollutes" beyond the extent of his own property, thus causing *objectively* provable danger or harm to others, then he should be held responsible, as indicated by *objective* laws.

But Dr. Johnsen does not stop at drawing false conclusions from sketchy data; he is also guilty of self-contradiction. He defends the credentials of those Reisman refers to as "alleged scientists," yet two column inches later, he denies that very existence of credentials with the apotheosis of man's rational nature: "Doctor, schmoctor."

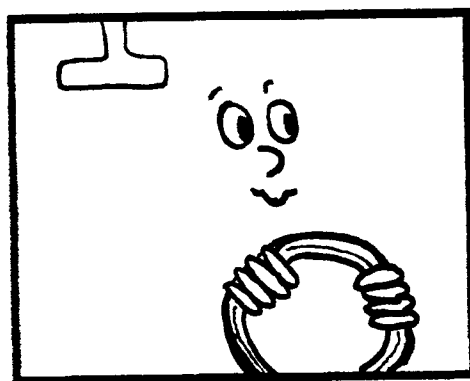
Laura Elder's statement to the contrary notwithstanding, one need not defend Reisman's credentials by threatening excretion of bodily fluids in the general direction of his detractors; one need only indicate that in order to earn a doctorate, one must learn quite a bit. Then again, perhaps Dr. Johnsen's article is intended to refute this by showing us that he, a doctor of philosophy, is no more competent a thinker than the average house plant.

Announcements

- S Chuck Earls wrote a lengthy letter to CNN's "Sonya Live", with suggestions as to how that program might benefit from Objectivism.
- S Also attending Dr. Reisman's speech were HOS members Warren Ross, Jeff Crow, Kirk Mashue, Dwyane Hicks, Anna Franco, Jeri Eagan, Chuck Earls, Chris Land and Jim and Sandi Brents, traveling from Bay City.
- S The Fourth Annual Texas Objectivist Societies Conference announces a Call for Papers. Forms are enclosed.
- S Brian and Dawn Phillips will host a study group on *Objectivism: the Philosophy of Ayn Rand*, starting Sunday, May 17. An announcement with map is enclosed.
- S Anna Franco, one of the founding members of HOS, is leaving for California, where she will study philosophy at Claremont Graduate School. We wish her well, and we'll miss her.

The Adventures of Al Truist

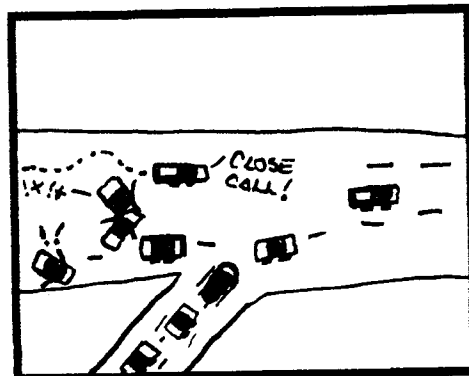
by Dawn & Brian Phillips



Al spends lots of time driving.



Even when he has the right-of-way, he always yields to merging traffic; He's a friendly driver!



Al meets lots of new people this way.

HOS President *Warren S. Ross*
 Editor: *Dwyane Hicks*

HOS Executive Committee:
C. J. Blackburn
Anna Franco
J. Brian Phillips
Warren S. Ross

The Houston Objectivism Society Newsletter supports Objectivism and the Ayn Rand Institute; however, we do not purport to represent or speak for the same. The Newsletter is published bimonthly for members, and membership dues are \$10 per year.

**ANNOUNCING
a
STUDY GROUP
for
OBJECTIVISM : THE
PHILOSOPHY OF
AYN RAND**

Where: The apartment of Brian & Dawn Phillips

When: Every Sunday from 3 to about 5pm, starting May 17.

Format: Gary Hull's Study Guide (available from Second Renaissance) will be utilized as a basic guide.

PLEASE CALL IF YOU PLAN TO ATTEND.

