



Two Students Win Fountainhead Awards

Each year, HOS offers prizes in the Houston area for *The Fountainhead* essay writing contest. Students send their essays to the national contest sponsored by The Ayn Rand Institute, and the best ones from Houston are judged by the HOS Executive Committee for our prize.

This year, our first place winner is Christine Nguyen. Miss Nguyen graduated this spring from Clear Brook High School. She was active in the debate club for three years, wrote for the literary magazine and was a member of Model U.N. and the poetry club. Miss Nguyen will attend Rice University this fall.

Our second place winner is Cindy Skelton. Miss Skelton graduated this spring from Cy-Fair High School. She was on the staff, then editor, of the school newspaper. She was also in Amnesty International and the "World of Difference" program (an anti-drug program). Miss Skelton will attend George Washington University this fall.

The award reception for our winners will be held at 7:30 pm on Saturday, August 22, in the Caspian room in the Underground of the Student Center at the University of Houston. Please plan to attend.

Reisman Video Debate at July Meeting

HOS will show "Regulating Economic Growth: A Debate", a video featuring Dr. George Reisman. From Second Renaissance Books: "How should the conflict between the demands of a growing population and an inadequate supply of public roads be resolved? In this lively, occasionally heated debate, Dr. Reisman presents the case against government intervention. This is a highly educational debate on a very topical political issue, one

that is now being argued in communities all across the country."

The meeting will be held at 7:30 pm, Friday, July 31, in the Caspian room in the Underground at University Center at the University of Houston.

Letter Writing at May Meeting

Brian Paillips presented a workshop on writing letters to newspapers and legislators and getting them published. At the end of his presentation, participants set to work writing letters on topics selected from the week's newspapers, then typed them for printing on a computer/printer setup provided by Dwyane Hicks and Warren Ross. Brian collected the letters for staggered mailing, and some of the published letters are displayed in the Mailbag section.

Among Brian's tips are the following:

When responding to a previously published item, refer to it initially with a very brief summary.

Restrict your letter to one topic.

Avoid insults or abusive language.

Concretize your argument.

Remember that you're addressing a general audience.

Double space your letter and limit it to one hundred words.

Two new HOS members were also welcomed: Mark Stapleton and Pamela Bacon.

Pragmatism and Ross Perot

by

Dwyane Hicks

Written prior to Perot's disengagement from the race.

The sudden emergence of Ross Perot's candidacy is not so remarkable as the situation which has brought it

about. As Perot has said: "What is happening has nothing to do with me."

"It has everything to do with people's concerns about where the country is and where the country is going." (Time, May 25, 1992)

Topping the nation's concern is fear over the state of the economy and the expanding deficit. With the government in gridlock over spending and taxes, the electorate sees no prospects for improvement. Add to this, the televised view of Los Angeles in flames and defenseless with a paralyzed police force, and you have a populace presented with a view of the future in every city: arsonists, thugs and looters roaming at will, chastised but "understood" by some, hailed as concerned citizens expressing their grievances by others.

While many recognized the racist focus of the looters, against orientals and whites, few drew any connection between the riots and deficit spending for "social" programs, the increase of which was the response of Congress. Thus when faced with self-righteous mobs at war with individual rights, Congress diffused the victimization to all taxpayers and shifted the explicit use of force to its quieter threat by the IRS. In both the streets of Los Angeles and in legislative chambers, the rights of man were expendable.

In this election year, the responses of presidential candidates have been alarmingly inadequate.

Clinton offers to be all things to everybody and to finance it by...soaking the rich. Besides denying rights to the productive, this ancient appeal to envy betrays the cynicism of his campaign, since everyone in politics knows that the taxable wealth of the nation consists of middle-income salaries and

INSIDE

Mailbag	5
Announcements	6
Al Truist	6

wages. Having rejected the message from Senator Tsongas in the primaries that reality might impose some restraints, the Democratic party continues on a destructive path. Gore's addition also caps a growing contempt from Democrats for the mind in all areas. Gore has not only pursued more controls in business and in new technical fields, such as genetic research, he has more than flirted with conservatives in regard to school prayer, abortion and censorship. Thus, it appears that Clinton is reaching out to conservative voters by appealing to their worst aspects.

Given the public's unease over government spending (as a whole) and its view of Clinton as superficial and unprincipled, his campaign has stirred little interest. That seems to be changing lately, however, as statisticians are forced to re-group for November, and the Democratic ticket is re-packaged as moderate.

Bush on the other hand stands for nothing and people know it. This consummate pragmatist has been simultaneously for and against all issues: taxes, environmentalism, Hussein, the deficit, free trade, the L.A. riots, etc. While actually advocating nothing but compromise, he relies on hoary "spiritual" positions left over from Reagan to give him a semblance of identity: family values, anti-liberty in regard to abortion and a thousand lights of altruism. Meanwhile the deficit, regulation, environmentalism and taxes have all expanded under his watch, concretizing the principle that the irrational needs only compromise to win, while the rational depends on a definite course.

In this and every election year, the discussion of politics and the underlying fundamentals is notably absent. Candidate speeches consist of trendy platitudes combined with a list of needs (often contradictory) to be provided by government. But even these speeches are not presented by media, despite the existence of the greatest communications capacity in history. Instead the public is given a mush of reports on campaign tactics, ad hominem attacks, periodic self-serving precautions about how the candidates use the media and

descriptions of how the wives of the candidates view their White House roles. On television, the most interviewed authority is another reporter.

While both candidates and the media are all superficially in conflict, they all subscribe to pragmatism. Each political camp explicitly affirms that "perceptions are reality", and media products attest to that viewpoint on a daily basis, with "filtering" by reporters deemed a necessary protection for the public.

"By itself, as a distinctive theory, the pragmatist ethics is contentless. It urges men to pursue 'practicality,' but refrains from specifying any 'rigid' set of values that could serve to define the concept. As a result, pragmatists--despite their repudiation of all systems of morality--are compelled, if they are to implement their ethical approach at all, to rely on value codes formulated by other, non-pragmatist moralists. As a rule the pragmatist appropriates these codes without acknowledging them; he accepts them by a process of osmosis, eclectically absorbing the cultural deposits left by the moral theories of his predecessors--and protesting all the while the futility of these theories.

"The dominant, virtually the only, moral code advocated by modern intellectuals in Europe and in America is some variant of *altruism*...

"In politics, also, pragmatism presents itself as opposed to 'rigidity,' to 'dogma,' to 'extremes' of any kind (whether capitalist or socialist); it avows that it is relativist, 'moderate,' 'experimental.' As in ethics, however, so here: the pragmatist is compelled to employ some kind of standard to evaluate the results of his social experiments, a standard which, given his own self-imposed default, he necessarily absorbs from other, non-pragmatist trend-setters." (Peikoff, *The Ominous Parallels*, p. 131)

Anti-identification

Liberals eschew ideology while furtively embracing it. To them ideology is any principle from the right and *honest, straight-forward* statism from the left. Being pragmatic is to propose

activist policies deemed reasonable by the unspoken premises of altruism and collectivism and to ignore or condemn any identification of these premises.

In this way, American liberals have hid their advocacy of statism from the public and from themselves for decades. "They do not want to accept the full meaning of their goal; they want to keep all the advantages and effects of capitalism, while destroying the cause, and they want to establish statism without its necessary effects. They do not want to know or to admit that they are the champions of dictatorship and slavery. So they evade the issue, for fear of discovering that their goal is *evil*." (Rand, *Capitalism: the Unknown Ideal*, "Conservatism: An Obituary", p. 195)

This evasion, thinly veiled by pragmatism, not only explains the superficiality of campaign coverage, it also explains why those "extreme" sentences are removed from your letter-to-the-editor and why the only principled opponent of zoning in Houston was left mostly out of the debate.

It also explains how liberals can ignore the charges of bias in the media. According to them, liberals are not presenting a distorted view of events but a moderate, non-ideological *pragmatic* one. Nevertheless, sensitive to the charge, token conservatives are presented as representatives of the right, not surprisingly qua editorialists, i.e., as ideologues, never as straight-forward, moderate deliverers of the news--that role is reserved for "reasonable" people. Thus, liberals present themselves as bending over backwards to be non-partisan while loading up "straight" reporting with implicit editorializing.

Anti-identity

Liberals do not hold a monopoly on evasion or pragmatism, as Bush has amply demonstrated, and it is why conservatives are institutionalized by liberals as the loyal opposition, as the only representatives of the right.

"Not daring to challenge the morality of altruism, the 'conservatives' have been struggling to evade the issue of morality or to bypass it. This has cost them their confidence, their courage, and their cause. Observe the guilty

evasiveness, the apologetic timidity, the peculiarly non-intellectual, non-philosophic attitude projected by most 'conservatives' in their speeches and in their writings. No man, and no movement, can succeed without *moral* certainty--without a full, rational conviction of the moral rightness of one's cause." (Rand, *Capitalism: the Unknown Ideal*, "Conservatism: An Obituary", p. 197)

When conservatives are not guiltily evading the fundamentals of egoism and individualism, which capitalism implements, they are saying that capitalism implements the fundamentals of self-sacrifice (George Gilder) and collectivism (George Will--See his column in the Houston Chronicle on June 28, 1992, wherein he decries the latest Supreme Court ruling on prayer in a public school: "A Rhode Island junior high graduate has successfully asserted her right to extinguish a traditional right of American communities to express reverence. Because something the community enjoyed annoyed this woman, communities from coast to coast must abandon traditions. According to liberal theory--individual rights are everything, community rights nothing--we are more free because of this," he reports sarcastically.)

With "opponents" of liberalism like this, is it any wonder that liberals boost conservatives to preeminence, while desperately ignoring Ayn Rand and others?

While both conservatives and liberals decry "extremism, the liberal position is more consistent and substantive since they evade only the effects of their fundamentals while retaining them. But the evasion of conservatives is in regard to fundamentals. Unwilling to defend self-interest, individualism or even reason, we find conservatives all over the philosophical spectrum, grasping at faith, tradition, community or even altruism to give them the illusion of substance.

The recent Supreme Court decision concerning restrictions on abortion found three Reagan appointees, in the majority, finding refuge in tradition and stability: *stare decisis* (Let the precedent stand). The majority expresses

what seems to be a genuine (and rare) concern for liberty in this case, involving, as it does, an individual's body: "These matters, involving the most intimate and personal choices a person may make in a lifetime, choices central to personal dignity and autonomy, are central to the liberty protected by the Fourteenth Amendment." At the same time, the majority re-affirms the collectivist notion of "accommodating the state's profound interest in potential life..." and allows State regulation prior to viability, provided that no "substantial obstacle" is placed in the path of a woman. No one but a pragmatist could think that these contradictory principles could be reconciled or be regarded of equal importance in the context of a constitution created to protect the individual from the state. The court bails out of this dilemma by deferring to tradition, a "fundamental" not unknown to conservatives but normally extending beyond twenty years. Thus does this court, in the words of the decision, "take care to speak and act in ways that allow people to accept its decisions on the terms the Court claims for them, as grounded truly in principle..." (How does one concretize a "progressive state interest" in the unborn? Taken literally, I know of no other option than that of full ownership by the state at birth.)

The conservatives in the minority, however, found their "fundamental" in a perversion of "strict interpretation" of the constitution. Earlier in U.S. history, advocates of freedom urged a strict interpretation in order to deny Federal intrusions into constitutionally unlisted realms. Today's conservatives, myopically unable to find "liberty of body" in the Bill of Rights, want to deny individual "intrusions" into unlisted or "unprotected" freedoms, an interpretation which ignores the ninth and tenth amendments and inverts the concept of limited government. (It also fulfills James Madison's prediction that future tyrants would use an explicit listing of freedoms to deny all others.)

The same group also came close to allowing prayer before a public school graduation, arguing that freedom of religion does not imply freedom from

religion. One does not have to be a genius of integration to see what fundamental actually guides Rehnquist, Scalia and, sadly, Thomas. While Scalia, et. al., imply their loyalty to "protected" liberties in contesting abortion, their contempt even for these liberties is revealed when forced to choose between them and religion. Conservatives, having evaded and dropped fundamentals of capitalism, are capable of anything.

At a lower level, Republican campaign operatives are inclined to drop even the pretense of fundamentals, with "dirty tricks" arising periodically as a substitute for issues or ideology.

In addition, this dropping of fundamentals seems to cause pragmatists on the right to take pragmatism more seriously: Bush really seems to believe that reality is malleable, that the "instrument" of thought "is not to learn facts or know reality, but to 'reconstruct' the situation so as to escape the trouble, remove the obstacles, and resume the normal process of unimpeded (and unthinking) action." (Peikoff, *The Ominous Parallels*, p. 129) As evidence, note how the present administration handles every contested, important issue.

Finally, perhaps the most immediate result of pragmatism on a daily basis is the confusion about issues, which it engenders. Public battles are fought daily on such a concrete-bound basis that I sometimes wonder that anyone outside of Objectivism has a consistent opinion. News and talk show arguments feature arbitrary assertions and *ad hominem* almost exclusively. Trendy cliches are simultaneously used to support opposing positions. The national debate has become incomprehensible shadow boxing to most, with unidentified opponents, sometimes changing places. Relevant to both the presenters of issues and their audience is pragmatism's implementation in education:

"The goal of the Progressive indoctrinaires was not to impose a specific system of ideas on the student, but destroy his capacity to hold *any* firm ideas, on any subject." (Peikoff, *The Ominous Parallels*, p. 134)

Non-philosophical Rebellion

Into this arena comes Ross Perot, who merely appeared on "The Larry King Show", saying that he would run for president only if people put him on the ballot in fifty states. The fact that that statement triggered a campaign shows how desperate people are for a known and decent candidate. Contrary to the notion of Perot attempting to buy the office, the motive power for this phenomenon was supplied by the public. Whether justified or not, Perot is seen as a potential savior of the country by many. Who would have pictured Joan of Arc with protruding ears and a Texas twang?

Perot is not an Objectivist--he is not even an advocate of the market; but he is an American business hero, who has distinguished himself with principled behavior in today's context (Try to imagine Lee Iaccoco or Donald Trump trying to save POW's or entering an Iranian prison to save his employees). What people see is a reality-oriented man who intelligently loves his country and wants to restore the American Dream. And even if people don't agree with many of Perot's positions, they sense that they can know who Perot is and that he has integrity, while Bush doesn't seem to know who Bush is.

Perot's first, and perhaps only, priority is not just balancing the budget, but dramatically reducing spending. His loyalty to individual rights, privacy and liberty in regard to abortion is obviously sincere and explicit. The question remains, however, whether he can maintain and defend his positions intellectually and morally.

Thus far, he has been attacked as authoritarian, intolerant, secretive and vindictive, paranoid, as a Washington insider masquerading as an outsider and as a man who flip-flops on issues. This is just the beginning, since the big guns of altruism and collectivism have yet to be fired.

There are indications that Perot has a superficial version of the intellectual equipment necessary to engage in this battle. In this, he represents the best of the American spirit. He reminds us that "Eagles do not flock" (individu-

alism). He is an absolutist, both in terms of facts and results and in terms of the need for moral behavior for personal values and in respecting individual rights. Although touched by religion, his moral foundation is predominantly secular: "Sure I go to church. But I'm not one of these guys who opens meeting with a prayer. When I run into a guy like that, I just button my wallet, because he's gonna pick it for the Lord."

Questioner: "Then to you, religion is private."

Perot: "Absolutely." (TV Guide, June 20, 1992)

But it remains to be seen if this is enough. He prides himself on being a great consensus builder and projects televised town meetings as a key to his presidential strength. Will this entail a democratic hammer on individual rights, the results of which he will be forced to accept by virtue of his integrity? Or will it simply be the means by which he puts public pressure on Congress to face reality?

His remarks concerning "welfare" programs usually focus on youth. Here, he says we must pragmatically finance such programs to head off the destruction and higher costs of later crime and incarceration. He endorses "work-fare" programs and talks of sending people into inner cities to provide medical care and food. In regard to education, he seems to give small, neighborhood grade schools the primary role of shaping "disadvantaged" youth into responsible citizens. In short, Perot offers nothing but optimization of mixed-economy answers to the issues of "welfare" and education. His answers accept the premises of the status quo and imply only that competent administration is needed, keeping well within Bismark's view of politics as "the realm of the possible."

What is the art of determining what is possible? Philosophy, and Perot is anything but philosophical, as his above positions show. For the most part, he avoids addressing "social" questions, claiming when possible that such issues are local concerns or that his job would be to focus on the primary of reducing the budget. Such evasion

ignores the fact that "social" issues are the source of our problems, including the deficit. His relief is apparent when he can answer questions in liberal terms, and he is too quick to swallow any liberal attack on Bush, e.g., the charge that Bush's focus on Willie Horton in the previous campaign was racially motivated. (It is conveniently forgotten that Al Gore initiated the Willie Horton issue.)

These aspects reflect philosophical weakness and a misguided desire to be non-confrontational. In the same spirit, he has said that his cabinet would be composed of the best of both Parties, that he wanted to hear all views on each issue. His non-confrontational, "let's all work together" attitude betrays a profound mis-reading of the nation's political problem: Blind to the ideological, epic struggle between individualism and collectivism, however obscured, he sees the conflict in Washington as only an amoral clash of "selfish" politicians and interest groups, short-sightedly enriching themselves with the government credit card. To Perot, ideology is only a scam used to justify picking all our wallets, just like the preacher. But Perot ignores the role of ideology in not only making this amoral clash possible but necessary. If individual rights are replaced by "collective rights", men have not choice but to cloak their cause as the public good, for which others must sacrifice. In regard to abortion, Perot does not acquiesce to collectivism by calling for consensus. Instead, he advocates the recognition of individual rights--but this is also the only possible solution for the deficit and all that it represents.

In regard to the clash of economic groups, the call for consensus is at least plausible, in that some human value is allegedly served. But how does one bring together the proliferating groups which have destruction as their goal? What compromise is possible between medical research and those who see baboons as no less valuable than man, or between those who seek power on the basis of race or sex and their victims, or between those who demand the destruction of industrial civilization and those who will die because of it? Such

groups do not seek to enrich anyone, and the attempt to include them in any consensus would be disastrous, politically and morally.

The only optimistic alternative is that Perot means something else by consensus. When he took on the task of reforming the structure of education in Texas, Perot devised a plan which conflicted with many of the groups interviewed and shepherded it through the legislature by lobbying one group: not the education lobby or even the general populace, but the business groups which provide campaign funding to politicians. His consensus building here consisted of persuading those whom he thought "owned" the process, and there was no attempt to compromise even with parents of high school football players, a brave act, indeed, in Texas. Who does Perot think are the "owners" of the process in America and what is the currency?

Perot is also a pragmatist, but his brand of it, compared to the alternatives, is mixed with honesty, common sense and American values. But if he panders to everyone, is non-confrontational and takes seriously the idea of consensus government; how long could he maintain his integrity or accomplish anything? How long before he turned into George Bush?

The candidacy of Ross Perot is an unacknowledged rebellion against statism and pragmatism. But revolution, not rebellion, is needed to get elected and to govern in any manner resembling success, a revolution in ideas. It is much too late to oppose statism without articulately challenging its fundamentals. Libertarians have tried anti-philosophy for twenty years, and non-philosophy may be no less inadequate. Perot may get knocked out of the race by some less fundamental issue, but his greatest challenges will be in dealing with altruism, collectivism and his own ignorance about the individual rights which he inconsistently endorses. If his candidacy is a reaction to what is negative in America, it may also demonstrate the practical, hard-nosed absolute necessity of knowing what you're doing; of knowing political principles and of knowing that they are derived from and

depend on more fundamental principles.

Altruism and collectivism still dominate this country despite their failure here and in Europe because there is no principled opposition. With the entry of Ross Perot into the campaign, that situation has not changed. \$



TO THE EDITOR: [Houston Chronicle, May 30, 1992] Environmentalists are not interested in "saving" the Earth.

Their stated goals are to destroy industry and return mankind to the primitive lifestyles of our ancient ancestors.

This explains why spotted owls are given more significance than loggers, why environmentalists continually lobby for tighter and tighter restrictions on industry, why they scream apocalyptic predictions about impending catastrophes with no factual evidence.

Since every productive human activity ultimately changes nature, an honest and consistent environmentalist would oppose all such activities. In practice and in principle, this is precisely where the environmental movement is taking us. *J. Brian Phillips*

[Houston Chronicle, June 10, 1992]

William Randolph Hearst, Jr., under the May 17 Outlook banner, calls for a revitalization of America under a re-elected George Bush.

Hearst calls for, among many outrages:

- a conscripted job corps of "young employable people";
- a complete moratorium on layoffs and strikes; and
- a voluntary agreement among workers to work extra hours for no pay.

All of this is requested under the guise of a "creation of a sane society." Hearst's request is a grotesque violation of the policies of free-market capitalism that has put America at the peak of world power. Hearst's ideas sound

astoundingly similar to what was once read in the Soviet Union.

All of these ideas would be soundly rejected by any "sane" president.

Mark Stapleton

[Houston Chronicle, June 6, 1992]

The largest and fastest growing part of our federal government budget is social spending. Politicians and citizens in general support these programs on moral grounds and want only practical limitations. Guess what happens? Morality wins and these programs grow.

The essence of the problem is the philosophy of altruism--the moral duty to help others. A balanced budget amendment will fail. What is needed is a philosophical amendment in the minds of the citizenry overturning altruism in favor of egoism--the morality of rational self-interest.

Charles Earls, III

[Houston Chronicle, June 6, 1992: Amendment to fix the budget?]

Federal deficits are of limited extent and are self-correcting in an economy that does not permit inflation. When the government extracts money from the capital markets to cover its debts, it leaves that much less for the private economy. Huge deficits will not be tolerated by citizens who see their own needs for capital being blocked by the government's. However, if the government is permitted to engage in the shell game of inflation, it appears to have a ready solution: Pay back the loans with depreciated dollars. Thus, while defrauding its creditors, it can deceive the populace into thinking that deficits are not such a burden.

Inflation, not budget deficits, is the real problem. We may not have high inflation now, but the budget deficits will lead to it in time. What we need is not merely a budget amendment, but to do away with inflation by establishing a gold standard. *Warren S. Ross*

Announcements

§ The May 1992 issue of *The Intellectual Activist* featured "A Brief Against 'Mandatory Pro Bono'", written by HOS member Michael Mazzone. Michael's brief was presented in court to intervene in a suit attempting to require Texas lawyers to provide free legal services as a condition of practicing law. Aided by The Association for Objective Law, Mr. Mazzone was able to win a dismissal, but on jurisdictional grounds. The *Houston Chronicle* reported on June 13 that the State Bar of Texas "rejected a requirement for lawyers to provide free legal services for the poor, but has recommended that all attorneys donate 50 hours of work each year." Houston Bar Association president-elect Lynne Liberato said: "If it doesn't work and things don't happen as a result, we can always take the right step, whatever that is." Mr. Mazzone's arguments were also covered in the *Texas Lawyer*, and *The Houston Lawyer* will be publishing an edited version of his brief.

§ Jeri Eagan just returned from Williamsburg, Virginia, where she attended this year's Conceptual Conference, "Objectivism '92." She reports that 280 people attended Dr. Peikoff's "The Art of Thinking" as well as a selection of the other 17 courses available in the arts, economics, philosophy, politics, psychology and science.

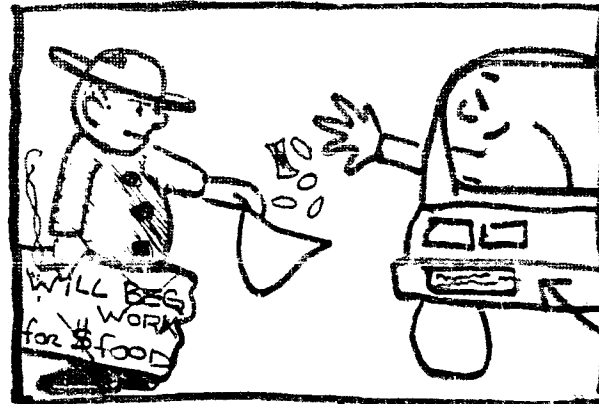
§ David Lynch, the creator of "Twin Peaks", brings back, unfortunately, Weimar Culture to television this summer with "On the Air" on Saturdays. If you can take much of this, it will at least concretize what Dr. Peikoff described in *The Ominous Parallels*, particularly the chapters "The Emotionalist Republic" and "The Culture of Hatred."

§ On a brighter note, Houston's Museum of Fine Arts was recently given William Bouguereau's (1825-1905) *The Elder Sister* and is displaying this French Romantic's portrait of a girl and her brother in the Beck Collection galleries.

§ The Spring, 1992 issue of the newsletter for the Association of Objectivist Businessmen includes an excellent examination of "The Jailing of Leona Helmsley" and current attacks on executive salaries. AOB News, P.O. Box 579, Moorestown, New Jersey 08057-0579.

The Adventures of Al Truist

by Dawn Phillips & Dwyane Hicks



. DPhillips '92.

WILL PAY--for momentary sense of self-worth and to alleviate guilt for not trading places.

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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.