

# Houston Objectivism Society

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Newsletter



## June Meeting: Read Any Good Books Lately?

Have you ever reached the mid-point of a book and been disappointed and mad that you had wasted your time? There must be a better way of selecting books. Well, here is an opportunity to discover worthwhile books that have appealed to other Objectivists and to hear why they enjoyed them. It is also an opportunity for you to share a special book with others. This is how it will work:

At the next meeting, everyone will bring a favorite book. We will gather in small groups of 4 to 6 people, and each person will spend five minutes or less explaining why his book is worth reading. Then the process will be repeated after members rotate into another group.

Think about a book you've read, fiction or nonfiction, that really impressed you but is probably unknown or unread by most of the other members. This rules out a few obvious choices, but duplication is still possible. To avoid such an occurrence, please inform Janet Wich of your selection as soon as possible. Her number is (713)879-4615

In the spirit of competition, a mystery prize will be awarded to the person with the book voted as most likely to be read.

Join the fun on Saturday, June 19 at 6:30 pm at the apartment clubhouse of Brian and Dawn Phillips. Enter through Gate 11 or 12--the access number is #5145.

## Poetry of Berton Braley in March

Linda Abrams brought the poetry of Berton Braley to Houston for our March meeting. Linda lives in Los Angeles and is the founder of *Past Times with Good Company*, a travelling

troupe of "living history" performers.

Besides incorporating several poems, which were new to this audience, into her presentation, Linda brought them alive with her enthusiasm and acting ability. In addition, the poems were interspersed with several biographical elements of Braley's life.

The presentation was followed by a brief question and discussion period.

## Phillips Speaks at HPR

Brian Phillips addressed the Houston Property Rights Association on May 14. Sixty five members were in attendance to hear Brian deliver his speech as chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee for the Defense of Property Rights. The text of his speech is followed by a description of the audience response and a comment on why the Right typically loses political battles.

### *Zoning: Winning the Battle but Losing the War*

*During the debate over zoning, its proponents have made many claims about zoning: it will encourage economic growth, it will improve our "quality of life", it will prevent "undesirable" land uses, etc. Underlying all of their arguments are three unspoken premises which have remained unidentified and unchallenged.*

*Exposing and refuting those premises would be devastating to the zoning movement, as well as many other movements. However, if we do not identify and thoroughly reject those premises, we may win the battle against zoning, but ultimately lose the war. This is the subject of my talk today.*

*In today's intellectual atmosphere, few concepts have been more perverted than the concept of rights. Everywhere we turn, we hear demands about a "right to a job," "a right to medical care", "a right to education," "rights" for animals, fetuses and trees, etc. Just as inflation of the*

*money supply erodes the value of the dollar, inflation of rights erodes legitimate rights--i.e., individual rights.*

*If we are to defend the right to property, we must begin by understanding what the concept of "rights" means, and upon what it depends.*

*A right is a moral principle which defines and sanctions an individual's freedom of action in a social setting. Rights establish the boundaries within which an individual may act. Rights allow individuals to act independently, rather than by permission. For example, one acts by right if one selects one's profession; one acts by permission if one's profession is chosen by the State.*

*You should note that my definition of rights recognizes freedom of action, but does not guarantee that one's actions will be successful, nor does it grant one a claim to the actions of others. This may seem like a petty distinction, but our ancestors fought the Civil War over it. At that time, Southern cotton farmers held that their "right" to cotton, and the quality of life it provided, justified a claim on the labor of others, namely, Negro slaves. This perversion of "rights" by the Confederacy was absurd, and it is no less absurd for zoning advocates to claim that they are protecting the property rights of homeowners by destroying them for everyone else.*

*Rights simply provide the proper social environment in which values can be pursued, attained, and kept. Consequently, there is no such thing as a "right" to a job, or a "right" to medical care, or a "right" to free education, or a "right" to a voice in how our neighbor uses his property. To claim that one has*

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a right to the products of another's labor is to claim that one has a right to enslave others.

We must also realize that there is only one way in which rights can be violated--by physical compulsion. When physical force is used to compel or prohibit certain behavior an individual is prevented from acting in a virtuous manner, i.e., according to his own rational, independent judgment.

The virtue of independence is not a mandate to do anything one wishes. Nor is it a directive to be different for the sake of being different. Independence means thinking and acting according to one's own rational judgment. It means placing the facts above one's desires or wishes. It means placing reality above fantasy. It means being rational and objective, and acting accordingly.

By implication, the successful businessman knows this. But unfortunately, many do not know it in explicit terms.

We are all familiar with stories of men who have conceived of a product which others called crazy. In fact, most of us probably arrived here today in one such product--the automobile. Yet, when people laughed at Henry Ford's horseless carriage, he did not abandon the truth he saw simply because others failed to see it. Their ignorance did not change the facts; their blindness did not alter reality.

Because he lived in a society which recognized his rights--i.e., his right to think and act without the permission of others--Henry Ford went on to produce an affordable means of transportation which revolutionized our society.

And Henry Ford is not an isolated example. Thousands, probably hundreds of thousands of men and women have pursued their own visions, on whatever scale, despite the condemnations and ridicule of others. And, I imagine it is safe to say that there are many such people here today. Rational decision making is necessary in every human endeavor, including the development and maintenance of real estate.

Zoning will prevent the rational, innovative thought which has made Houston so prosperous and America so economically powerful.

Under zoning, all land use is determined by zoning officials. They may zone

a parcel of land for any use they choose, or completely prohibit development of that land. They may attach any conditions they choose to a building permit. Not only may they zone an area for a particular use, such as single-family homes, they also have the power to define what constitutes that use. Zoning officials thus have complete reign over the use of land within a community.

This kind of power is a magnet for special interest groups, each pleading for its own pet cause. One may demand Spanish architecture, while another wants to limit a building's size. One group may insist on the inclusion of public sculpture, while another wants to cancel the project entirely.

Through all of this, a developer must helplessly sit while others debate his future, while others determine what happens to his dreams, his property, his life. He becomes a hostage to the desires, decrees, and demands of others. He may act, not by his own independent judgment, but by the permission of zoning officials. No matter how rational and consistent with the facts his judgment is, it is swept aside by the decrees of the zoning board. No matter how proper and beneficial his decisions are, they can be voided by the fiat of others.

Zoning officials thus become more than simply masters over a property owner's actions; they become paralyzers of his mind. They make his decisions and conclusions irrelevant, for he cannot act on them.

This is the most crucial issue of our time, and not only in regard to zoning.

While I have identified the role of the mind in the development of property, this same principle also applies to all property owners, large and small, as well as the consumers who are served by them. Zoning negates not only the judgments of developers, but also home owners, convenience store customers, and every other consumer in a community, which means, everyone.

The very nature of zoning demands that the rights of individuals be violated. By preventing individuals, as consumers and producers, from acting according to their own independent judgments, zoning prevents individuals from practicing the virtue of rationality.

Given the fact that zoning is such a blatant violation of individual rights, why have its advocates been so successful? Why is zoning on the brink of being adopted by City Council? And given zoning's institutionalization of force and negation of rational judgment, how have zoning advocates been able to use the term "planning" in a manner which portrays them as advocates of the good?

Zoning has been presented as a cure to many of Houston's ills. We have been told that it will protect our neighborhoods from greedy developers, that it will "empower the people", that it will allow for a "common vision" to guide Houston's future growth. Zoning advocates have even claimed that zoning will bring "rational planning" to Houston's development. Underlying all of these claims are two unspoken premises--premises which many, if not most, of zoning's opponents also accept.

Zoning advocates believe that the good of the community supersedes the good of any particular individual. They believe that we must all make certain sacrifices for the welfare of our community. They believe that those who do not make such sacrifices "voluntarily" should be forced to do so.

On the other hand, many zoning opponents agree that the welfare of the community does require some sacrifice on the part of each of us. And they agree that some "selfish" people will refuse to do their "fair share" and must be "prodded" into participating. They object when such "prodding" goes too far. They don't object to sacrifice, or prodding, only to taking it to "extremes". They don't object to abrogations of property rights, except when they occur in a comprehensive fashion. The best example of this are those who oppose zoning but do not oppose other infringements of property rights, e.g., restrictions on billboards, ordinances controlling sexually-oriented businesses, etc.

These so-called "opponents" of zoning share the same fundamental premises as zoning advocates, premises which justify zoning and many other injustices: They believe that the sacrifice of values is moral, and the unit of significance is the group rather than the individual. These two concepts--sacrifice and collectivism--



dominate the debate over zoning.

To the collectivist, individuals are insignificant--each of us is here only to serve the group, whether it is the community, or our nation, or our race, or our economic class. The individual is to be subservient to the group, which may demand anything and everything from him. If he refuses, he is labeled as selfish, greedy, a "rugged individualist," out of touch with the times, etc. And in the end, the individual is forced to sacrifice his values for the alleged benefit of others.

If the opponents of zoning agree with zoning advocates that sacrifice is good and the public welfare is something other than the well-being of individuals, then opponents to zoning will have surrendered the moral high ground and zoning advocates may lose the battle, but win the war.

Even if our referendum [opposing zoning on the November ballot] is successful, the principles accepted by both sides demand that the elements of zoning will be ushered in, one by one. Over the past decade, we have already seen this, as City Council has enacted ordinance after ordinance that, in other cities, are part of comprehensive zoning, e.g., controls on sexually oriented businesses, a landscaping ordinance, sign and billboard restrictions, heliport and parking controls., etc.

Instead of defending their right to earn a profit, to grow rich, to pursue their own values, Houston's businessmen have usually meekly complained that such controls were too excessive, and then sought to compromise with their destroyers. Today, the destroyers are knocking on the door, demanding the final compromise.

Zoning demands sacrifice, subservience to the group, and uses force to insure compliance. The only alternative to zoning is capitalism, and it can only be defended on its intellectual and moral base, i.e., self-interest, individualism, and reason.

Faced with this alternative, what is one to do? Should one abandon the realm of ideas, declaring it impractical and impotent, and raise a million dollars to run a series of television ads? [Editor: A previous speaker in this forum asserted that trying to persuade the public was futile, that this was a political fight;

therefore, only a media campaign to get out our voters would be effective.] Or should one confront those who seek to enslave him, and make them justify their actions? Should one surrender one's values, or should one fight for them?

If you choose to fight for your values, you can only do it by identifying and defending your right to those values. There are essentially two things you can do to defend your rights.

First, familiarize yourself with the moral and intellectual foundation of capitalism. Toward this end, I am offering free copies of Ayn Rand's book The Virtue of Selfishness to those who are interested. In this book, Miss Rand explains the relationship between the mind and rights more thoroughly than my time here permits. Those who are interested in the ideas I have expressed today are encouraged to pick up a copy of this book.

Secondly, when engaged in discussions, or writing letters to the editor, etc., regarding zoning, be certain to identify the distinction between zoning and a system based on property rights. Zoning is a system which demands the sacrifice of values, which demands that one cut one's own throat, or cut the throat of others. As the philosopher Leonard Peikoff has said, capitalism is a system which opposes throat cutting as a matter of principle. You should point out that zoning uses force to compel or prohibit certain behavior, while capitalism is a system which allows individuals to engage in peaceful, voluntary relationships. There is a fundamental difference between zoning and capitalism, not only in regard to politics, but also in regard to how human beings are viewed.

Opponents of zoning know that zoning is a giant land grab. Advocates of freedom need to have the courage to challenge not only this injustice but the previous wholesale theft which made it possible--that of the realm of ideas and morality.

First of all I would like to say that it was a personal pleasure to hear these words spoken publicly, before an audience of businessmen. And the response of the audience was very favorable, as

indicated not only by the concluding applause but also by the rapt attention accorded by the audience for thirty minutes.

Some of the audience members were already familiar with Ayn Rand, and an additional fourteen asked Warren Ross for copies of The Virtue of Selfishness at the end of the speech.

During the question period, a few sympathetic comments were made, but only one actual question was asked: "What is your view of nuisance laws? Do they have any validity?" Brian answered, "Yes, as long as they are objective, i.e., as long as they protect an individual's right, objectively demonstrated, and as long as the evidence is objective."

Having previously heard a Libertarian, with whom the questioner is familiar, state that zoning has its historical source in nuisance laws and that "therefore" nuisance laws are invalid, I assume that this confusion was the source of the question. I might add that this argument is a non-sequitur: it throws out the baby with the bath water. Even if zoning started as a subjective expansion of legitimate law, e.g., objective limitations on noise levels, the existence of zoning restrictions do not invalidate previous objective law. But equivocating between arbitrary, statist law and law that protects rights is not a new phenomenon for those who condemn any form of government as illegitimate, and thereby view equally the U.S. and a dictatorship.

After the question period, one businessman asserted that only one argument was necessary to defeat zoning: It costs too much. While wondering if he had heard the speech, I reflected that, yes, it costs too much in dollars, but, more importantly, it costs us our freedom, as has every statist program since FDR. The argument of "it costs too much" implies that zoning is otherwise of value, that the choice between rights and zoning is of no more political significance than, e.g., the selection of vendors for a business. This argument inappropriately applies economic calculation to fundamental political issues--one might just as absurdly suggest that murder has been



found to be unproductive because of a cost-benefit analysis. Freedom is "cheaper", but what has escaped this businessman, as well as conservatives, Libertarians and free market institutions of this century, is Ayn Rand's exposition of why it is right and of the fact that only a defense based on morality is practical.

Until Ayn Rand, the only defense of capitalism was that it is practical, and advocates of freedom, such that they were, left unchallenged the statist's monopoly on morality. Except for Objectivists, the Right continues in this cowardly and losing strategy.

If practicality is measured by whether a policy serves some ends and if altruists and collectivists are unrestrained in defining ends, then the Right will always be seen as reactionary, immoral and, even, impractical. President Clinton was elected not just from an ignorant view of what would rejuvenate the country but also because he was seen as the practical implementor of the statist ends he championed.

Among opponents of zoning, "horror stories" of zoning practices are often recounted as if awareness of them alone will persuade the public. But if sacrifice to the community is accepted as proper and as a necessary aspect of zoning, such "horror stories" may be regarded as indications of progress, however sad to the unfortunate victims.

At the end of Brian's speech, one person jokingly asked: "Who is John Galt?" Part of Galt's answer to that question is the following: "And if you wish to go on living, what you now need is not to return to morality--you who have never known any--but to discover it."

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## Binswanger Visits Austin

by  
Robert Garmong

*Dr. Harry Binswanger was invited to address the University of Texas Department of Philosophy upon requests made to the department by graduate student*

### *Robert Garmong and Students of Objectivism president Benjamin Whitcomb.*

On April 8 and 9, Dr. Harry Binswanger spoke at the University of Texas. On Thursday, he presented his talk "*Buy American*" is *Un-American* to a general student audience. On Friday, he presented his talk *Bridging the "Is"- "Ought" Gap: Morality from Facts* as a colloquium to the UT philosophy department.

The "*Buy American*" talk went extremely well. Though the midterm-week audience was only a little over one hundred, which is disappointingly small on a campus of this size, it was very receptive to Dr. Binswanger's speech. There was only one hostile question, from an individual who tried to make a speech on the "environmental evils of capitalism." One philosophy professor asked Dr. Binswanger a very well articulated, sympathetic question about child labor under capitalism. The question period lasted for more than two and a half hours.

This talk is an excellent introduction for uninitiated college students. It deals with a "hot" political issue, but one which does not immediately arouse irrational emotions in most educated people. Dr. Binswanger presents the case for free trade in terms of broad principles of economics and philosophy, which makes very clear the connection between Objectivism and the concrete issues of daily life. I recommend this talk to other campus club organizers.

The colloquium, predictably enough, was not as well received. Out of a department of approximately thirty professors and one hundred graduate students, five professors and about twenty graduate students attended (including two graduate students and one professor who are Objectivists). In addition, there were nearly sixty others present, including local Objectivists [Editor: and four from Houston], club members and other undergraduates. This is the largest attendance at any UT philosophy colloquium I have ever heard about.

Dr. Binswanger's speech on the "is"- "ought" gap is the single best

speech on technical philosophy I have ever heard. He presents the basic argument in favor of the gap, as presented by David Hume, and refutes it in detail. Then he presents Ayn Rand's derivation of values ("oughts") from life (an "is"). As Dr. Darryl Wright, an Objectivist philosopher at Claremont, has said, no one can hear this speech and still honestly believe that Objectivism is not a serious philosophy. Nearly all the questions were from philosophy professors and graduate students.

One professor, interested in Dr. Binswanger's presentation of the example of the immortal and indestructible robot (which Dr. Binswanger used to illustrate the fact that values are impossible apart from the alternative of life or death), argued that the robot could be equipped with a pleasure/pain sensor, and thus would be capable of having values--so values are not "necessarily" based on life, they only "happen" to be connected to life in "contingent fact." When Dr. Binswanger rejected the analytic/synthetic dichotomy, several professors described it as "an interesting move to avoid objections," as if it were a tactic of philosophic mind games.

A graduate student asked how one one would prove, from life as the standard of value, that it was immoral to hit his friend sitting next to him. Dr. Binswanger pointed out that one has to decide what principles of action are required for dealing with people successfully. Those principles have to be based on the nature of man. Man is a rational being. In principle, the use of force turns that part of men which could be of value to you--their rationality--into your enemy. The philosophers in the audience were upset that this was "merely an inductive, probabilistic argument, not an airtight deduction."

Pursuing this issue further, one graduate student asked why a life-promoting ethics would consider immoral someone who lived his whole life as a cheat. "Because there is no such person," Dr. Binswanger responded--causing a burst of hostility from the philosophers. Dr. Binswanger explained the role of principles by an example: if it is



a principle of stock market investing that one should never buy a stock on good news (since the more knowledgeable investors will generally have brought the price up by the time the news breaks), then it is irrelevant to ask: "What about some guy who made money consistently over the long term by buying on good news?" You can't get rich by violating a proper principle of investing.

Undaunted, one philosopher asked: "But what about someone who does?"

This event was a success--it forced the philosophers of our department to face the fact that Objectivism has serious arguments to offer. For two hours, they were not allowed to get away with "business as usual." And they are now aware that there is a substantial Objectivist movement, with serious, technical philosophers. This event was also very rare, in that an Objectivist view was presented under the official auspices of a philosophy department at a major university.

A year ago, when the student Objectivist club sponsored Dr. George Reisman's talk on "The Toxicity of Environmentalism," a philosophy graduate student was shocked by Dr. Reisman's rejection of the intrinsic theory of value in favor of the objective theory. "I'd like to see someone present this theory of values in the philosophy department," he smirked. Now, it has happened.

## Additional Description of Thursday's Question Period, by the editor

After the speech on Thursday, for a general audience, Dr. Binswanger answered questions for an extended period. This is a report on just a few of those questions, which I thought would be of most interest. After the transcription of the first question and answer, I have given my summary of Dr. Binswanger's answer. The first questioner spoke of the environment:

*Green sweater (GS): I fear two consequences of the philosophy you've suggest-*

*ed. The first one is that it sounds to me that if we allow capitalists to run wild...*

Harry Binswanger (HB): Can I interrupt a second? I'm not suggesting we let capitalists "run wild", I'm saying we should stop letting government run wild. The wildness is force. Capitalism is a system of rational, calculated, planned production. Government controls are the system of brute force, of savages running in the streets. So, running wild is a characteristic of barbarous, statist government regimes, not of capitalism. If you want to say unfettered capitalism, that would be fine.

*GS: If we allow capitalists to run wild, I'm certain that they would completely destroy our environment.*

HB: I hope so. I'm in favor of adapting the environment to man's uses, I'm anti-environmentalist. Objectivism is the only philosophy which is radically anti-environmentalism...except Marxism, which, strangely enough, though opposite of Objectivism, also holds that nature is there to be subdued by man. And you'll find this split, now, between the New New Left and the Old New Left--that the real Marxists say, no, we need more products, and environmentalism doesn't make sense.

The world exists not even for man, the world exists for me, and, from your perspective, the world exists for you, to make out of it what you will.

*GS: No...*

HB: Well, then die. Why are you living?

*GS: The world exists for every living creature that is here, not just for me.*

HB: Then die. Let some worms eat your corpse. I owe no responsibilities even to other human beings, let alone dogs, cats, worms and nature. The only responsibilities I owe to other human beings is to leave them free, as I want to be left free of them. You are not born in debt. You are not here in trusteeship for planet earth. Your life is all you have. After you die, there will be an infinity of non-existence, as far as you're concerned. You have one life--live it. That's what we're saying.

*GS: I can see that you have a religious approach, tonight.*

HB: No, I'm an atheist. Objectivism is

strongly atheist. And religion also says bow down, there's something greater than you, you are in servitude, you are a creature: humble yourself. We're saying the opposite: exalt yourself. Life is to be lived, the good is to live it.

Incidentally, in practical terms, where is the environment in the best shape and where is it in the worst shape? It's in the best shape in the U.S. and worst in the communist countries. It's unbelievably filthy and dirty and polluted in Eastern Europe and in Russia. Because, in fact, technology, Capitalism and businessmen create a nice world for you to live in. When I said I hope they destroy the world, I meant it in this sense: what they call "destroying the world" is actually making it serve human purposes. Capitalism makes a world in which it is nice for us to live in. It does not say that you cannot cut down the forest because of the spotted owl. It says whoever owns that forest may do whatever he wants with it, and he can take out his gun and shoot that spotted owl if he wants to.

Let me just tie that back into my talk. It's individualism, it's egoism, it's not collectivism of humanity, and it's certainly not collectivism of other living species.

For the next few questions, Dr. Binswanger dealt ably with common misconceptions about capitalism, after which, a questioner asked what ideas of Objectivism allowed Objectivists to come up with simple, observable solutions to economic "problems".

Dr. Binswanger noted that Objectivists have confidence in a free market because they have confidence in reason. Since a free market is nothing but the liberation of the mind as applied to creating values, Objectivists are sceptical when encountering assertions that the market has inherent problems. Thus, just as a child would look for a mistake if told that two plus two equals five, Objectivists know that some arguments entail a fallacy because of their conclusions. By contrast, Conservatives believe that man is no good and that the sphere of reason is limited. Thus, they believe that the market will work



to some degree but are not surprised or concerned when someone asserts that government "corrections" are needed.

In addition, the Objectivist methodology of thinking grounds logic in the nature of existence and focuses on essentials. Thus, rationalism or "building castles in the sky" is avoided.

**On Russia:** Russia is floundering because there is no actual de-nationalizing of the property--the government remains the owner. What was emphasized recently in the news was that prices were allowed to rise to the "free market" value, but this is like letting our Post Office charge whatever it wants for stamps and calling this capitalism. Yeltsin's plan for distributing vouchers for shares in factories seems pretty good, although I don't know the details. Russians have rid themselves of the political control, but, economically, it's still communism.

**Property rights of the "commons":** I don't think you can allot "property" to air and I'm skeptical whether you can allot "property" to running water. But there can be use rights and the right to your body. If you are using the air, and you are, and someone starts putting contaminants into the air which, you can show, wind up in your lungs, or on your wash as it hangs up to dry, there have always been laws allowing you to sue to stop this.

In regard to right of use, first users are to be protected; subsequent users cannot interfere with prior users.

**Insider trading:** Information is a value, requiring effort to achieve, and should be owned. There is no such thing as unfair trade between consenting adults unless fraud is involved, and withholding information is not fraudulent. The whole purpose of stock market analysis is to gain superior understanding of the future prospects of the company. So, non-owners of stock cannot claim a right to the knowledge of owners. In contrast, the government position is that unequal information, per se, in a trade is wrong, that the superior information which you earned is owed to another. The only real issue

here is the terms of contract between the owners (stockholders) and the employees (CEO, etc.). The contract should specify whether employees may trade on inside information as part of their remuneration.

**Alan Greenspan:** I know nothing more about him than you do, but I would describe him as a combination of Peter Keating and Gail Wynand. He seems to want power, and he's willing to sacrifice any previously held ideas to get it. I mean anybody who would be at the State of the Union message, standing up and applauding for socialized medicine next to Hillary Clinton, is certainly a traitor to Objectivism if there ever was one.

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## Survey Results

At the beginning of this year, the executive committee of HOS sent a questionnaire to members requesting their estimate on current activities as well as their views on what projects to pursue in the future. A table was distributed showing current and possible projects, with projects separated into four categories: Support of ARI, Support of Membership, Spread of Objectivism and Intellectual Activism in Politics.

Eighty six percent of responding members provide financial support to ARI.

Almost every project in the remaining categories received some support, but the most support was voiced for the following:

For Member Support, activity in holding taped lecture series and for sponsoring workshops in different subjects were requested the most.

Under Spreading Objectivism, focussed pamphleteering and scheduling ARI speakers generated the most enthusiasm.

In addition, many members expressed interest in working on particular activities.

Some changes will be made in club meetings at some point during this

summer, due to questionnaire feedback: Meetings will occur monthly, on the first Saturday of the month, and meetings will include, when possible, a discussion of current events in different formats.

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## WACO

**(We Ain't Comin' Out)**

by

Dwyane Hicks

Every few years, the religionists of Texas or Utah entertain the nation with a grim spectacle. They do this, it seems, as a public service to remind us that no matter how bad things get, religion is worse.

David Koresh's synthesis of the Pilgrims and the Alamo provided no new insights into the consequences of faith, but it made many religionists uncomfortably conscious of their ideals. One headline in the religious section of the Houston Chronicle urged the community to "Combine Faith with Skepticism", just the kind of command that Mr. Spock of *Star Trek* use to give to hostile alien computers, causing them to self-destruct.

How can a man purport to be a moral leader while teaching children to shoot themselves in the mouth rather than in the temple, so as to ensure "success"? How can adults, know of such things, inside and outside of the compound, and still regard a man as holy? In "What is Capitalism?" in *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*, Ayn Rand describes the intrinsic theory as one "that holds that the good is inherent in certain things or actions as such, regardless of their context and consequences, regardless of any benefit or injury they may cause to the actors and subjects involved."

The response of religious people was to blame the stinker in Waco, not religion, itself. This evasion follows the practice of liberals throughout this century in blaming Stalin, Mao, etc. for lousing up "noble" socialism. So called Objectivists who support Libertarianism also have their own version of this eva-



sion: it's just those pesky leaders who write the platform, view patents and copyrights as tyranny and proclaim as heroes pederasts, prostitutes, drug dealers ...and David Koresh.

For Koresh was painted as a Libertarian hero during the last couple of months--with demonstrations in Waco, letters to the editor in Dallas and Houston (asserting that we're living in a police state) and calling Janet Reno a mass murderer.

This Libertarian evaluation was really no surprise, given Koresh's actions: he had his way with girls (literally), he stocked machine guns and grenades and he killed officials of the government. But the sad part is that some conservatives have indirectly taken up Koresh's cause, by attacking the ATF and the FBI as corrupt, incompetent, murderous, conspiratorial and publicity motivated.

My speculation is that sympathy for religion and antipathy for gun control are the real causes for such criticisms, and the means are unsupported allegations, especially for those pertaining to conspiracy.

But two issues are to be separated out from the criticisms of the ATF and the FBI. The first is their competence in serving a warrant, surrounding and sealing the compound and ending the conflict. It is perfectly legitimate to evaluate official actions, policies, training and competency in regard to the Waco affair. But these issues have purposely been blended with the second issue--the legitimacy of the two institutions and their roles of law enforcement. The issue of legitimacy has been dishonestly pursued by means of the first issue.

The issue of gun control is too complex to examine in this short space, but the ownership of machine guns and grenades by citizens is neither a requirement of self-defense in emergency situations nor an implication of the Second Amendment. Contrary to the criticism of the ATF's launching an assault on "peaceful" citizens, the deaths of four agents suggests that the strength and precautions of the ATF were inadequate, not excessive.

Similarly, the FBI is criticized for

not being omniscient and omnipotent. Why did they pick a windy day? Why didn't they put out those fires? Why didn't they know that three fires would be ignited simultaneously and have firemen in place, wearing bullet-proof vests which would withstand the vest piercing bullets previously used by Koresh on the ATF?

It seems that law enforcement is culpable for not being god-like, while Koresh is blameless for God-like presumptions.



#### Houston Post-- 4/5/93

With everything I have seen printed in the paper regarding zoning in Houston (or anywhere else), I have yet to see the principles which underlie zoning addressed by anyone. In fact, they seem to be ignored and/or avoided "on principle"!

The truth which cannot be ignored is this: The right to own property means the right to its use and disposal by the owner in any manner, so long as the rights of others are not violated--the rights of others do not include a "right" to a governmental guarantee of property value or investment protection. Any investment involves a risk, which the buyer agrees to assume by choice.

With zoning, the property owner would maintain the responsibility of paying taxes and general upkeep, but will have to ask permission regarding its use. In this context, the so-called owner owns by permission, since the right to its use has been shifted to a committee--voted for by his neighbors, who are happy to think that they will have a say in the use of property which they do not own.

This is true; no matter to what degree zoning may be implemented, the principle will remain the same.

Those who deny or ignore this can close their eyes as tightly as they want--just like a person who denies the existence of an oncoming train while stand-

ing in the middle of the tracks. In the end, the consequences are inevitable.

*Dawn Phillips*

#### Houston Post--4/6/93

Rather than give Boris Yeltsin aid, Bill Clinton should give his Russian counterpart some advice (of course, it is advice that Mr. Clinton is also in need of).

In Russia, a cultural heritage demands an omnipotent ruler. In the United States, ideology demands growing government control over our lives.

The consequences of Russia's ideology have become historical fact--poverty and suffering on a scale unimaginable to most Americans. The consequences of America's ideology is a fact which becomes clearer each day--expanding poverty, crime which effects virtually every American, a shrinking economy, etc.

Russia needs the free market, i.e., a separation of state and economy; so does the United States.

*Brian Phillips*

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## Announcements

\$ I would like to thank Jeri Eagan for her continuing help in producing this newsletter.

\$ Correction: In the January issue of this newsletter, I mistakenly identified James Hill, potentially the producer of a re-make of *The Fountainhead*, as the same James Hill who directed *Born Free*.

\$ Congratulations to Yaron Brook of Austin, who will be Assistant Professor in Finance this fall at Santa Clara University, near San Jose, California. Yaron and his wife, Tal, have been persuasive and gracious leaders for Objectivism while Yaron has studied for his PhD at the University of Texas. They helped found the Texas Objectivist Societies Conference and have been prominent participants each year. In addition, Yaron initiated *Values* in Austin, establishing a center for promoting art and Objectivism. *Values* will be holding its going-away party on June 5 at *Dan's Place*, and the art displayed there will be on sale at a 25% discount until that time. (For more information, call Yaron at (512)447-5992.) Yaron, Tal and their two young sons will be sorely missed by their many friends in Austin and in Houston.

\$ We would like to thank the many members of HOS who wrote letters to radio program directors requesting that they pick up the Sun Radio Network broadcast of Galt's Speech from *Atlas Shrugged*. Curiously enough, two Oklahoma stations carried it while no Texas station did. Nonetheless, thanks for the effort.

\$ The Objectivist Health Care Professionals Network (OHCPN) is an organization dedicated to the restoration and preservation of freedom in health care through the spread of the philosophy of reason. Their "Self-Defense Kit" is available from OHCPN, 500 Metropolitan Ave., Suite 453, Brooklyn, NY 11211. The price is \$7, payable to Salvatore J. Durante. OHCPN publishes *The Forum*, available for \$15, payable to Pamela L. Benson, at *The Forum*, P.O. Box 4315, South Colby, WA 98384-0315.

**Yuks** by Alice de Kok



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