

# Houston Objectivism Society Newsletter

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## THE HEART (AND MIND) OF A CHAMPION

by J. Brian Phillips

If it were a movie, critics might proclaim that it was not believable. They might argue that the plot was based on a naive idealism which has nothing to do with the way life really is.

But it's not a movie, and it is quite believable-- the Houston Rockets successfully defended their National Basketball Association (NBA) championship. In a season filled with injuries, trades, team dissolution, etc. the Rockets were able to achieve the ultimate goal of their profession. They repeatedly demonstrated what coach Rudy Tomjanovich (Rudy T) called "the heart of a champion."

Much has been said about the Rockets, both locally and nationally. But a few specific points are worthy of comment in this forum.

Despite winning the championship last season, the Rockets were not regarded as serious contenders this year. Their success was regarded as a fluke. The Rockets, while hurt by the lack of respect, did not respond by whining. They simply proved their critics wrong. They won.

To win a championship in any league is an accomplishment. Success in athletics requires the practice of the same virtues which makes the attainment of any goal possible. What distinguishes the Rockets from their opponents is the consistency with which they practice those virtues.

While most teams practice hard, are ambitious, have confidence, develop strategy, etc., the Rockets practice these virtues, and others, to a degree which their opponents must envy and Objectivists should admire. Specifically, two virtues-- pride and selfishness-- separate the Rockets from their opponents.

Throughout the playoffs the Rockets refused to engage in "trash talk", i.e., malicious and denigrating commentary about one's opponent. This is a common activity in professional sports today, as if values can somehow be gained by demeaning others. The Rockets rejected this attitude, preferring to *earn* their values on the court.

The Rockets demonstrated a genuine

confidence and pride in their abilities and accomplishments. They did not need, or seek, the pseudo-self-esteem which comes from belittling others. The values they sought could only be gained by performing successfully.

No player better exemplifies this than Hakeem Olajuwon. Since arriving in Houston more than a decade ago with few basketball skills, Hakeem has transformed himself into one of the best players in the world. "I believe in maximizing my talent," he told the Houston Chronicle. "I believe in getting better, not better than other players, but better than myself. I compare myself to myself."

This approach means that Hakeem is constantly seeking to improve. He is not content to be good, or even great. He wants to be the best player that *he* is capable of being. Such ambition can only be the result of a profound pride in one's ability and one's accomplishments. Hakeem knows that he is capable of being better and he refuses to accept anything less.

As an example, each year Hakeem learns a new skill or perfects one he already has. In the past, this has included improving his free throw shooting percentage, perfecting his passing, and developing the unstoppable "Dream Shake".

Early in his career, Hakeem was an emotional player, often out of control, and seldom confident in his teammates. He often attempted to win games by taking unwise shots, rather than passing to an open teammate.

In game 3 of the Finals, he had the ball with about 15 seconds remaining and the score tied. As Orlando double teamed him, Hakeem spotted Robert Horry at the 3-point line and passed the ball to Horry, who calmly hit the shot to win the game.

Most commentators would call Hakeem's pass an example of unselfishness, which they hold to be the essence of team play. They believe that players who subordinate personal statistics and accomplishments for the benefit of the team are unselfish; players who are primarily



concerned with their individual accomplishments are called selfish.

This view represents a philosophical inversion. Basketball is a team game, and the goal is to win the championship. As in any cooperative activity, players must focus on the long-term, agreed upon goal of winning the championship, rather than short-term or narrow goals. Properly conceived, there is no conflict between individual accomplishments and team victory. Individual efforts aimed at anything but winning the championship are destructive to that end.

Players must perform together both offensively and defensively. Each player must fill a specific role or roles. Just as a factory requires a wide variety of workers to accomplish a complex task, a team requires a wide variety of players.

Basketball is a fast paced game in which players must instantaneously evaluate a situation, choose a course of action, and then execute that action. But the decisions and actions of teammates must be coordinated. If Kenny Smith sees an opportunity for a pick and roll, while Robert Horry is preparing for an "alley-ooop", neither's actions will be effective. Similarly, if Sam Cassell is directing his opponent toward a double-team, but no teammate reacts similarly, the maneuver is ineffective.

Just as a common goal unites factory workers, the members of an athletic team must be united by the common goal of winning the championship. The ultimate success of each depends primarily upon the intelligence directing its actions.

The directing force behind the Rockets is Rudy T. Like most NBA coaches, Rudy T spends a tremendous amount of time analyzing game films and studying scouting reports. What distinguishes him from his colleagues is how he uses the information he obtains. More than any person, Rudy T is responsible for the pride and rational selfishness exhibited by his team.

Rudy T's basketball philosophy is simple-- treat your players with

respect, explain your game plan to them, and place the success of the team above any other consideration. Rudy T has convinced his team of this philosophy, and he practices it consistently.

For example, over the past 2 seasons, he has traded three players who played significant roles on the team (Otis Thorpe, Scotty Brooks, and Robert Horry). Each of these trades were emotionally difficult and fairly controversial. Yet, Rudy T did what *he* believed to be in the best interest of the team, not what was popular with the public or what would cause him the least emotional discomfort.

Assistant coach Carroll Dawson once said, "He has a real soft, but firm hand with the players. They don't always like what he gives them. But in their hearts they know it's what's best for the team."

To Rudy T, doing what is best for the chosen goal is not simply an empty slogan, but a commitment which every member of the team must make. One Rocket-- Vernon Maxwell-- who refused, was given a "leave of absence" at the beginning of the playoffs. Maxwell, who had been a starter before the Rockets traded for Clyde Drexler, refused to accept Rudy T's decision to play the better player (Kenny Smith did accept Rudy T's decision when Sam Cassell was given more playing time). Instead, Maxwell resented the coach's decision and became disruptive.

In molding a championship team, Rudy T looked for a particular kind of player. While athletic ability was important, character was more fundamental. Rudy T looked for players who were able, and willing, to be rationally selfish team players.

Having won two consecutive championships, Rudy T is now being hailed as a coaching genius. He eschews that label, believing that his success is the result of hard work. Rudy T does work hard to be successful, but his achievements are the result of something more fundamental.

The Objectivist virtues are inter-related, and all are essentially an application of the primary virtue of rationality. At least implicitly, Rudy T embraces and practices those virtues in the realm of basketball.

In trading for Drexler, Rudy T demonstrated independent judgment. In playing the best players, he practices justice. In practicing the philosophy he espouses, he shows integrity. In basing his decisions on the facts, rather than his emotions, Rudy T exhibits honesty and rationality.

The admirable characteristics of the team are almost rivaled by the reaction of its fans. When Detroit and Chicago won NBA titles earlier this decade, the fans of those teams "celebrated" by looting stores and burning vehicles.

In Houston, when revelers congregated along the Richmond Strip to celebrate the Rockets' victory, police officers did not have to arrest arsonists and vandals. Instead, they exchanged "high fives" with the revelers. In Houston, achievement was celebrated, not through destruction, but with benevolence.

The only explanation offered to explain these divergent reactions was to proclaim that Houston is different from other cities. This is correct, but superficial.

Houston is probably the freest city in the world. We have no zoning, no rent control, no income tax, fewer regulations than other cities. Our city was founded as a business venture, and that entrepreneurial spirit continues today. There is a genuine and widely held respect for achievement, rather than the resentment for achievement and the choking government intervention which is typical of other large American cities. This is what makes Houston a unique city. Houston deserves the Rockets, and the Rockets deserve the fans of Houston.

The Rockets are more than champions of the NBA. They have fought adversity and triumphed. They are a symbol of those virtues which make success possible. They are heroes.



## LYCEUM IN REVIEW

### Integration: The Dynamo of Reason-- Gary Hull

by Sean M. Rainer

The title of Dr. Gary Hull's lecture at the February Houston Lyceum Conference says it all: integration is the dynamo of reason. It is not the point that integration is useful, stressed Dr. Hull, but that it is the very method by which reason operates. An understanding of this is important in the development of one's thinking skills. Furthermore, Dr. Hull said, integration is the method by which one can understand Objectivism and "keep it real".

Integration, the process of uniting elements into one inseparable whole, is the cardinal activity of man's knowledge. Every aspect of reasoning, including concept formation, creativity, etc., operates by connecting knowledge. Dr. Hull discusses the nature of thinking in his article "How Force Stops Thinking":

[Thinking] is a process of grasping reality by following a chain of conceptual relationships, with each item of knowledge being connected to other items, until they are interrelated into a non-contradictory total, a whole which becomes, then, an identification or a new conclusion. All valid thinking entails integration (*The Intellectual Activist*, September 1994).

The focus here is not on content, but on method: the process by which you should use your mind. Method is more fundamental because it actually determines the content. Observe that your ideas do not spontaneously "appear" in your mind; rather, they are the result of a certain process, i.e., a method. To study your own cognitive habits requires "introspective

abstraction". In other words, a focus on *how* you think, not *what* you think.

Dr. Hull then gave several examples of the practical applications of integration in the fields of business, science, and perhaps most interestingly, art. In business and science he gave concrete examples of men taking knowledge in one field and applying it to another, i.e., cross-discipline. An example of this would be the use of titanium metal in golf clubs and tennis rackets.

In the area of art, integration plays several different roles. Not only does art require intense integration by the artist, but, through an elaborate example using two contrasting paintings, Dr. Hull also argued that "Art is the integration of man's metaphysics brought to the perceptual level." Art concretizes, in one shot, one's metaphysical premises.

Dr. Hull then turned his attention towards the validation of integration. What are the facts of reality that give rise to the need for integration? Dr. Hull first observed that man's mind, by its very nature, is integrating. Sensations are integrated into percepts (a non-volitional process); percepts are into concepts; and concepts into higher level abstractions. Indeed, the Objectivist view of concept formation is the foundation for this. Unit perspective is an example. In reality there are many separate things. By isolating essential characteristics, we can integrate separate entities into "interchangeable members of one group".

A principle, Dr. Hull noted, is a form of the unit perspective and a result of integration. A principle is a combination of a number of

generalizations into an inseparable whole. Again, this illustrates the importance of integration. The process, as Dr. Hull explains, goes from 1) observing particulars, to 2) making generalizations, then 3) integrating all the generalizations and, finally 4) form a principle. Thinking in principle, then, is actually a form of integration. Also, Dr. Hull emphasized the importance of filing your knowledge according to its essentials. The purpose of essentials is condensation for the purpose of integration.

Dr. Hull outlined the process as follows:

1. Generalize each concrete;
2. Look for a principle (a fundamental integration of generalizations);
3. Discover the philosophic principle;
4. Check the knowledge to see if your other ideas are true, i.e., expand your knowledge by finding parallels between the principle and the rest of your knowledge.

For five hours of lectures, Dr. Hull was able to strike a balance between the abstract concepts needed to validate the importance of integration and the concrete examples needed to truly understand this importance. After his mentally exhausting course, the importance of integration was obvious to those who were in attendance. In every aspect of life, consciously or subconsciously, by volition or not, integration is, as the title of Dr. Hull's lecture summarizes, the dynamo of reason.



# LONDON LYCEUM REVIEW

by Dwyane Hicks

"Integration," said Ayn Rand, "is the essential part of understanding." And integration was the key to and the theme of the London Lyceum Conference in May, 1995.

John Ridpath opened the conference, speaking on "Integration and Human Life: The Case of Jean Baptiste Say."

Dr. Ridpath began by presenting Say's famous insight--known as Say's Law--in its historical context. By the early 1800's, men of the Enlightenment had thrown off the shackles of religion and arbitrary authority to discover a natural order in every field, from Newton's integrations in physics to Locke's integrations of rights in politics. Adam Smith in economics had challenged the system known as mercantilism, where the state intervened in matters of trade for the "benefit of the country," to show that a focus on the self-interest of the individual trader resulted not only in maximizing individual value but served, as if "guided by an indivisible hand," the interests of all men.

In this historical context, the question arose as to whether the workings of a free market were orderly and stable--whether free production and trade would be the genesis of increasing wealth and growth or the cause of dislocations and cyclic instability through the mechanism of "overproduction" of goods and services.

Say answered this question by pointing out that "Supply creates its own demand." Building on the work of Adam Smith, Say showed that the sum of all "excess" supplies, evaluated at market prices, must be identically equal to the sum of the market values of all "excess" demands.

The self-interest of individuals would, in working out any inequality in these sums, operate automatically to regulate production and trade and thereby render superfluous and even destructive intervention by the state.

Dr. Ridpath then proceeded to explicate Say's Law, showing how it applies equally in a simple barter system or in a complex money-based system of unlimited range. He also showed that the introduction of money, a kind of good, introduced no new factor which would invalidate or modify the illumination of Say's Law.

In the second presentation of the conference, Peter Schwartz spoke on "Contextual Knowledge." Mr. Schwartz began by quoting Dr. Leonard Peikoff on Ayn Rand's observation that knowledge is contextual. From "The Philosophy Of Objectivism" lecture series, Dr. Peikoff said: "By 'context' we mean the sum of cognitive elements conditioning the acquisition, validity or application of any item of human knowledge..."

"In regard to any concept, idea, proposal, theory, or item of knowledge, never forget or ignore the context on which it depends and which conditions its validity and use."

In a virtuoso application of this principle, Mr. Schwartz asked: "Can one hold a 'correct' view for the wrong reason? For example, is the devout religionist who believes in the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill' a genuine opponent of murder?" Mr. Schwartz demon-

strated that the man who accepts this proscription in obedience to God's will, will commit any act including murder when he feels that it is in accordance with that will.

The "why" always determines the "what." Thus the very meaning of a statement is determined by the premises on which it is based. With the seemingly uncontroversial statement-- "A man ought to have the right to his own religion"--Mr. Schwartz demonstrated the widely divergent meanings of this statement from five different contexts. He also examined the proper method of judging various viewpoints--from Social Darwinism to conservatism, from Libertarianism to "moral tolerationism"--that hold patently false premises, yet reach conclusions alleged to be compatible with Objectivism.

Following dinner, Dr. Michael Berliner, Executive Director of the Ayn Rand Institute, noted that the purpose of the Institute is virtually to change the world. He then charted the course of the Institute from its beginning ten years ago and discussed plans for its future.

On the following day, Dr. Harry Binswanger began a two-part course on "Psycho-Epistemology," a concept which Ayn Rand defined as "the study of man's cognitive processes from the aspect of the interaction between the conscious mind and the automatic functions of the subconscious."

Dr. Binswanger stated that Ayn Rand came to study this aspect of human consciousness when she realized that her disagreements with other intellectuals were rooted not just in the differing contents of their minds but in the differing method of their operation.

Dr. Binswanger noted that the human mind can be viewed from two aspects: according to its content, which is usually called motivation, and according to method, which Ayn Rand called psycho-epistemology.

For example, from the aspect of motivation, Peter Keating habitually sought the approval of others; from the aspect of psycho-epistemology, Keating saw the world through the eyes of others, i.e., he was a second-hander.

While both the conscious mind and sub-conscious mind have content, the issue of psycho-epistemology deals with the interaction of both.

To me, the most interesting and consequential part of Dr. Binswanger's talk was his identification of the manner in which different people program their subconscious. You've probably noticed that productivity is often a matter of how organized one is. A person who organizes their desk, their files, their notes, etc., is often the person who effectively has those things ready to be used, while the disorganized person is effectively denied access even to those things he has in possession but cannot readily find. If one needs also to organize one's subconscious for similar reasons, what principles should guide that process? Is effort involved? Dr. Binswanger's answers were illuminating.

"Integration: The Dynamo of Reason" by Dr. Gary Hull was a "how to" course. Dr. Hull delivered his lectures in an interactive manner, calling upon students to actively "chew" the material and make integration a



guiding principle of their thinking.

Dr. Hull started by providing an overview of integration, noting that it is, as the process of uniting elements into an inseparable whole, the key to understanding and retaining content. Then he provided examples in the areas of business, science and art to show the limitless range of integration. The course also dealt with a number of exercises of increasing difficulty to help the student automatize the practice of integration. In this manner, students were provided instruction in how to gain that skill peculiar to Ayn Rand's "mountain top" grasp of concretes and current events.

Dr. Hull also examined some contemporary examples of nonintegration and disintegration, such as complexity worship and anti-system building.

On this second day of the conference, Dr. Andrew Bernstein also began his three-part course on "Ayn Rand's Fictional Characters as Philosophical Archetypes." The first two lectures dealt with characters from *The Fountainhead*, while the final lecture dealt with characters from *Atlas Shrugged*.

Dr. Bernstein demonstrated that Ayn Rand's characters are not just unique, unrepeatable individuals but that they are embodiments of different philosophies. Not surprisingly, the topic of Dominique Francon probably drew the most questions.

Dr. Bernstein brought to this subject a wealth of scholarship, which illuminates the characters and the events of Miss Rand's novels.

In addition, he imbues this topic with an energy of demonstration and wit. His learned yet colloquial commentary made this course one of the most enjoyable.

The third day of the conference began with Peter Schwartz's second speech: "Multiculturalism and the Anti-Conceptual Mentality."

Mr. Schwartz began his speech with a mystery: Multi-culturalism (MC) seems both to deny differentiation and to uphold it. In what way and why? MC says that we must abandon Euro-centrism so as to be more inclusive, bringing everyone together. But MC also upholds differentiation by ethnicity--so that one is urged to be a hyphenated American, e.g., an African-American, as opposed to being merely an American. What is it about MC that explains this paradox?

Mr. Schwartz first focused on the "multi" of MC, pointing out that the older style of egalitarianism urged that individuals merge "equally" into a col-

lective, whether the standard for that collective was based on race (Aryan) or on means of production (proletarian). But the newer style of egalitarianism, while still collectivist, eschews setting a standard for group affiliation, seeing all such groups as of equal value, within certain limits. What are those limits, i.e., what is it that determines a "culture"?

This brought us to the "culturalism" of MC, the distinctive characteristic of which being that "culture" not be determined by volitional, i.e., by chosen, values. A "culture" is determined by unchosen tribal characteristics, e.g., by race or by gender. Thus, Mr. Schwartz noted, Anita Hil's testimony should not have been judged by whether it was true but by whether it was feminist; and judgment should not be pronounced on O.J. Simpson as to whether he is guilty but by whether he is ethnic. "Culture" is an anti-concept which attacks knowledge and values.

Mr. Schwartz had further observations about what he called the anti-concept "diversity." If diversity is such a value on college campuses, why isn't Ayn Rand studied? Mr. Schwartz examined these concepts and demonstrated how they are used to identify the premises behind the multi-culturalism movement. In doing so, he showed them to be quite consistent and alarmingly dangerous.

These latest developments emanating from the universities of America did not arise in an historical vacuum, and Mr. Schwartz links them with changes in the welfare state.

After dinner on the third evening, Dr. Berliner presented "Treasures from the Ayn Rand Archives." This consisted of showing slides of unpublished photographs of Ayn Rand and related items, accompanied by Dr. Berliner's comments and excerpts from her letters. The show covered her earliest years in Russia as well as her time in America. One of my favorite aspects about this show was seeing childhood pictures of Ayn Rand, with those big, intelligent eyes.

On the last day of the conference, an open forum for questions was attended by the six speakers. The answers were very interesting and I would like to recount some of them here, to the best of my memory.

Dr. Binswanger was asked whether pointing out that computers could not have volition was a good argument for refuting the idea that computers can think. He responded that this was true, but that it wasn't a good argument, saying

## INTELLECTUAL ACTIVISM

Houston *Chronicle*  
May 30, 1995

Regarding Jack Rakove's May 21 Outlook article, "What became of the 'Us' in U.S.A.?"

Although grossly distorted for most of this century, rights are uniquely individual, do not guarantee entitlements, and are not subject to compromise.

This distortion is the problem in the United States today, not, as written by Jack Rakove: "Our obsession with rights makes it impossible to pursue a democratic politics of accommodation and compromise."

We haven't forgotten the "Us" in U.S.A., we've forgotten the "I".

This country is based upon the fundamental right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The government's responsibility is only to ensure that we are free to pursue happiness-- to seek work and earn money with which to trade. It is not responsible for ensuring that we have work and money.

A citizen's only responsibility is to observe the rights of others. However, before an entitlement can be given away, it must first be taken from someone else. This violates the "donor's" rights by essentially enslaving him to the "entitled".

How much enslavement is considered acceptable? Ayn Rand pointed out: "In any compromise between good and evil, it is only the evil that can profit."

Paul Sean Hill



that the issue was more fundamental: First of all, computers are not alive. On top of that, they are not conscious, and, finally, they lack volition. Dr. Binswanger elaborated, in regard to consciousness, that computers do not even add! Adding is literally an action of consciousness, he explained. What computers do, instead, is manipulate electricity as programmed by a consciousness, which is then able to interpret the results of those manipulations.

One attendee asked Peter Schwartz how egalitarians could be presumed to be so manipulative. Schwartz responded that the game would be up if these people just came out and said: "Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen--We'd like you all to die."

One question addressed the propriety of creating new words which were either gender-neutral or attempted to make the population use words which referred to both genders or only the woman, e.g., "s/he" instead of "he."

Gary Hull blasted this form of neologism, saying that it was arbitrary and without merit to invent such words. Dr. Binswanger added that Dr. Hull was right but that this wasn't just an issue of language-- it is more fundamentally a metaphysical issue. Remember, said Dr. Binswanger, man is also a biological entity, and the sexes are not equal. "I am a male chauvinist," Ayn Rand said, and whereas "man" can represent both sexes, "woman" cannot.

Another questioner asked Schwartz for help in fighting ethnic jokes: "I don't think they're ever justified," the questioner said, "and, yet, some people here think that's not true." Schwartz said that some ethnic jokes were wrong, but many ethnic jokes insulted no individual but a mistaken aspect of some ethnicity. Thus, many so-called ethnic jokes take some implicit value as the standard in making fun of unattractive characteristics known to be practiced in a specific culture. It is those chosen characteristics which are being humiliated, and rightly so.

Andrew Bernstein was asked the anticipated question concerning Dominique's "rape." Was it or wasn't it? Bernstein cited literary context in many ways: the flaunting visits to the quarry, the outrage of

Dominique when Pasquale Orsini, "a short, squat, middle-aged Italian with bow legs," arrived instead of Roark to replace the marble she had broken, the branch slashed across Roark's face, the pleasure in not taking a bath afterwards. These references, and others, Bernstein ticked off; then he raised the point that rape concerns consent. Did Dominique give it? Bernstein's elaborate answer left even the other speakers laughing and the audience wondering if perhaps Dominique hadn't raped Roark!

This was the second Objectivist conference in Europe, and it went well although the attendance was lower than conferences in America. Among other things, this reflects the lower availability of Ayn Rand's books. Whereas in an American bookstore, one can readily find on average three or four Objectivist books, perhaps only one chain in London has one or two books on display--others must be ordered. What are the prospects for Objectivism in Europe?

The issues confronting man in Europe are the same as in America. So are the fundamentals, but in Europe the acceptance of certain fundamentals is more profound. With the observation of countless concretes, it is apparent that the underlying acceptance of altruism and collectivism in Europe is much greater. That is not encouraging, but another aspect is.

Collectivists in America, even in the 1930's, have never had clear sailing in implementing their goals due to America's historical context and sense of life. Also, Pragmatism has had more influence, in part because it was misrepresented as a reality-oriented response to European rationalism (See *The Ominous Parallels*.) I think these two causes contribute to the effect that issues are more openly and clearly delineated in Europe, where socialists have never had to hide their aims or their means. Thus, in reading a European newspaper, one often finds words such as: socialism, capitalism, compulsion. Especially with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the collapse of collectivism is more readily identified. Thus, though the degree of acceptance of bad fundamentals is greater in Europe, the principles

involved are more visible, and vulnerable. As Ayn Rand wrote in "The Anatomy of Compromise" (*The Objectivist Newsletter*, Jan., 1964): "When opposite basic principles are clearly and openly defined, it works to the advantage of the rational side..."

On both sides of the Atlantic, the emperors are naked. Although the emperor is uglier in Europe and the people are less inclined towards beauty, their vision is often sharper.

## THINKING IN ESSENTIALS

On August 12, Pravin Shah and Warren Ross will present a workshop on thinking in essentials. After discussing the method of thinking in essentials, workshop participants will apply this method to analyzing the movie *Forrest Gump* to identify its essential theme.

Please watch the movie beforehand to maximize your effectiveness in this workshop. While watching the movie, it will be helpful if you try to write down some of the following: 1. initial impressions of the movie; 2. a one-sentence statement of the essential plot; 3. essence of characters Forrest and Jennie; 4. a one-sentence statement of the theme; 5. why you think the movie is so popular.

You may also wish to reread chapter 5 of *The Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, on the topic of definitions, which covers Ayn Rand's identification of the meaning of essentials in the context of concept formation.

Come prepared to work, and to hone the critical skill of seeing in a movie, a person, a book or a cultural event what constitutes its essence.

The meeting will begin at 6:30 p.m. in the University Center on the University of Houston campus. Due to construction, a specific room has not been designated for the meeting. Signs will be posted in the University Center on the night of the meeting. A map of the campus can be found on the back of the insert.



## HOS MEETING SUMMARIES

by Sean M. Rainer

### Ayn Rand Appreciation Day June 10, 1995

As part of the "Ayn Rand Appreciation" HOS meeting in June, members huddled around a speaker phone to listen to a ARI employee and Ayn Rand biographer Mr. Richard Ralston. The meeting, which I hosted, also included a sample of "tiddlywink" music and short presentations by Janet Wich and Warren Ross. The meeting was held in the home of Mrs. McFadden, who also provided the refreshments. We also welcomed guests John and Karen Ford and Stanley Lewis.

News and announcements before the meeting: Warren explained the new system for the HOS library. Brian Phillips updated members on the progress of the CPR. Janet, once again, reminded members that the pamphleteering goal is considerably behind schedule.

Ayn Rand often said that man is a being of self-made soul. I tried to explain in what way I thought this was true for Ayn Rand herself. To do this, I planned a presentation that would explore a) some of Ayn Rand's early development, her struggle and success in her writing career and her decision to become public philosopher; and, b) her unique and important achievements in both literature and philosophy. The goal was to look at Ayn Rand's life (present) and the problems that plagued thinkers before her (past). Janet would then handle the "future" portion by talking about the ARI essay contests and the impact that she personally has witnessed in her capacity as a high school English teacher.

The highlight of the meeting was a teleconference from California in which Mr. Ralston talked for about half an hour about the book he is currently working on and then answered questions about the same. Mr. Ralston is piecing together an "autobiography" of Miss Rand from various sources such as the hours of interviews that were conducted with Miss Rand in 1961, her personal journals, interviews with Dr. Leonard Peikoff and Dr. Harry Binswanger, and a number of more obscure sources.

The book, which is tentatively titled *Ayn Rand In Her Own Words*, will give those interested an idea of what Ayn Rand was like as a person. However, as Mr. Ralston points out, one of the purposes of the book is to show that Ayn Rand was the kind of person that you would expect her to be, i.e., like one of her heroes. Ayn Rand herself once wrote, "There is nothing of any importance to be said or known about me-- except that I wrote *The Fountainhead*."

The factual events of Ayn Rand's life are as extraordinary as the person whose lived them. Were

Ayn Rand's life made into a movie, the naturalists would claim that it was too unrealistic. In every essential, Ayn Rand was exactly the hero that she had to be in order to bring to life such heroes as Howard Roark and John Galt.

Warren, who attended several of Miss Rand's Ford Hall Forum speeches and had the opportunity to meet her briefly, noted that Ayn Rand's life was a series of goals and goals reached. In other words, Ayn Rand would decide what she wanted to do and how she was going to do it and then she would do it. She wanted out of Russia-she plotted and succeeded. She wanted to be a writer-she began planning in her pre-teen years(!) and eventually achieved unprecedented success. She wanted to take on the corrupt philosophy of over 2500 years-she defined a new philosophy called "Objectivism" and today we attend meetings of the Houston Objectivism Society.

This sense of life is described in her play "Ideal":

Kay Gonda: What do you dream of?

Johnnie: Nothing. Of what account are dreams?

Kay Gonda: Of what account is life?

Johnnie: None. But who made it so?

Kay Gonda: Those who cannot dream.

Johnnie: No. Those who can only dream.

Ayn Rand dreamed and she dared to make that dream a reality.

### Literary Analysis July 8, 1995

Using Shakespeare's "Macbeth" as an example, Janet Lee Wich instructed HOS members at the June meeting on the proper principles and methods of analyzing a play. The meeting was held in the home of HOS president Warren Ross, who also supplied the refreshments. Members also welcomed first time visitor Mark Potoczny.

Warren announced a new addition to the HOS library, *The Work of Human Hands*, which is the heroic story of surgeon Dr. Hardy Hendren. Janet reporting on the progress of the pamphleteering project, and noted that many members are behind in their pledges. Those who are behind can use the mailing labels previously purchased for the health care project to send Dr. Peikoff's "Health Care is Not a Right" pamphlet to physicians. David Wilens announced plans to form a research group on the initiation of force. Janet is forming a study group to listen to "The History



## INTELLECTUAL ACTIVISM

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Unfortunately, House Judiciary Committee Chairman Henry Hyde apparently agrees with Lisa Tsai who wrote in her June 7 Outlook article that physically desecrating the flag should be outlawed to protect this country's ideals through a constitutional amendment. However, the founders intended for the Constitution to protect individual rights, not good taste.

Flag-burning in and of itself does not violate anyone's rights. Public fires which endanger other people's safety do. Stealing a flag to burn does. Burning a flag on someone else's private property does. Those are already against the law.

Flag-burning may indicate an incomprehensible disregard for the ideals embodied in the Constitution and the basis for this great nation, but it's not a threat to national security. Do we follow a flag-burning amendment with an anti-cursing amendment or anti-modern art amendment?

Ostracize flag-burners culturally. Don't vote for them. Don't invite them into your home. Don't marry them. Maybe even, don't employ them. That's your choice. Don't incarcerate them, and don't wreck the Constitution over bad taste or stupidity.

Paul Sean Hill

of Philosophy: Kant to the Present" lecture tapes.

In preparation for the meeting, members had been asked to read *Macbeth*. Janet lead members through the play systematically, first studying the main characters, then the plot, and finally the theme. Janet was unable to discuss the style of the play because of time considerations.

Characterization, as defined by Ayn Rand, is the portrayal of those essential traits which form the unique, distinctive personality of an individual human being. Dialogue and action are the evidence upon which one bases one's conclusions about the characters and their motivation. Janet used textual evidence to summarize, in a sentence or two, the characters of King Duncan, Banquo, Lady Macbeth and Macbeth. For each character, Janet read selected portions of dialogue. This allowed attendees to identify the essence of each character. King Duncan, for example, was identified as a benevolent and just man, but a poor judge of character.

One criticism of the characterization in *Macbeth* was the absence of clear motivation on the part of the characters, especially Macbeth. Why, for example, does Macbeth want to be King? No answer is supplied is the entire play. It was noted that this is a common flaw in Shakespeare's writing, most likely the result of a predilection towards determinism. Some men just possess "vaulting ambitions"-- i.e., inborn desires-- and no deeper explanation is regarded as necessary by Shakespeare.

Plot is the purposeful progression of logically connected events leading to the resolution of a climax. Janet summarized the main events of the play: A thane (Macbeth) plots to become king through murder. The deed unhinges him psychologically and contributes to his eventual downfall.

Style, which Janet was unable to cover in her talk, is the author's choice of content and choice of words. Some major points of style to note about Shakespeare is his use of

poetry and the enormous vocabulary of Shakespeare found within his writings.

The theme is the summation of a novel's abstract meaning, i.e., the idea the author is trying to get across. This, according to Janet, is the most important consideration when forming an overall evaluation of a work of art. In the case of *Macbeth*, looking at the main characters and the plot, the theme can be summarized as: When a person chooses to do something he knows to be wrong, he will suffer negative consequences both psychologically and existentially.

Before analyzing a play one must first read it properly. As Janet pointed out, plays can be harder to read than a novel because it requires more imagination and "filling in the blanks." To this end, Janet gave several suggestions. It is important to always read the stage directions. While often overlooked, these are often crucial to understanding of the play. Most plays (in written form) consist almost exclusively of dialogue. Stage directions help the reader understand what actions are taking place. Similarly, sound effects often set the mood for a scene. For example, *Macbeth* opens with "Thunder and lightning," which adds to the dark and somewhat mysterious opening scene.

The reader should also picture the characters and everyone on stage while reading. This is a way to both stay in focus and, perhaps, learn something about the relationships among the characters. At the same time, try to imagine how the actors would say the words. Note emphasis and pauses, which are clues to the interactions between the characters.

Janet concluded by noting that this method is applicable not only to plays and novels, but also movies. Her presentation not only helped attendees develop and perfect their skills in literary analysis, but also gave them a greater appreciation of William Shakespeare.