

Houston Objectivism Society Newsletter

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Justice for Wyatt Earp

by J. Brian Phillips

One hundred and twenty years ago the American West was a vast, open area brimming with natural resources and opportunity. Cow towns and mining camps sprung up across the landscape. From around the world, millions of people flocked to the Western territories with the hope of making a better life for themselves. Many came to find gold or silver. Others came to open saloons, general stores, and other small businesses. And still others came to steal from the productive members of the west.

It was in such a setting that Wyatt Earp lived and worked. Like many of his time, he skipped from one boom town to another, always optimistic that his fortune awaited at the end of another long, dusty ride. And in nearly every town he invariably found himself called upon to bring law and order to what was previously anarchy. Earp's exploits in taming lawless cow towns and mining camps and his bravery in facing ruthless killers-- particularly at the OK Corral in Tombstone, Arizona-- make him one of the great figures of the American West.

Western legends have long been a popular subject for film makers, and Earp has been one of the most popular. Indeed, no less than six movies have been made about him. I have seen five of these movies, and they vary widely in both their artistic quality and their historical accuracy.

Three of these movies, *Wyatt Earp*, *Tombstone*, and *Gunfight at the OK Corral*, depict, among other things, the

feud between the Clanton and McLaurey gang and the Earp brothers-- Wyatt, Virgil, and Morgan-- which culminates in a gunfight in Tombstone's OK Corral. In addition, these movies also present the friendship between Wyatt Earp and John "Doc" Holliday, a former dentist who has come west to find relief for his tuberculosis. Despite the commonality of plot, the themes of these movies are quite different.

Early Westerns were generally Romantic in nature. They presented man as a volitional being, capable of choosing and pursuing his values. Early Westerns were movies which depicted a struggle between opposing value systems, between good and evil. The heroes of these movies are abstractions-- characters who embody the essential qualities of greatness.

However, many of these movies were based on historical figures. Thus, the writers could not exercise complete selectivity-- they had some responsibility to adhere to the historical facts. The result was a mixture of fact and fiction, an attempt to present heroes while being limited in the means of doing so.

But these movies are not documentaries either. For example, in the movies about Wyatt Earp, the writers had an entire life of events from which to choose. They could not present every event in the life of Wyatt Earp, and thus the writers had to exercise considerable selectivity in determining which events to depict, which to omit, and which to rearrange.

In this regard, such movies can be

Lyceum Conference

Lyceum International will bring its regional conferences back to Houston on February 16-18. The conference will be held at the Sheraton Grand Houston Galleria.

The lecturers are Dr. Andrew Bernstein, Dr. Gary Hull, and Mr. Richard Salsman.

Dr. Bernstein will present the second part of his lectures on the philosophical principles embodied by Ayn Rand's fictional characters. Among the issues he will address is the nature of the love relationships in Miss Rand's novels.

Dr. Hull will lecture on the indispensable role of art in concretizing philosophy. The course will help attendees "chew" the idea that art is an objectification of metaphysical value judgements.

Mr. Salsman will present an introduction to pro-capitalist economics. Among the topics he will cover are the business cycle, inflation, unemployment, and foreign trade. The course will be presented in a workshop style, allowing attendees to examine concrete examples and newspaper reports to distinguish truth from falsehood.

Lyceum International can be contacted at (306) 876-5868.

evaluated by esthetic principles. The writers literally recreate the subject of their film, be selecting those events which dramatize their vision of the fundamental nature of his character. They had the choice to omit or include every scene and each line of dialogue. They had the choice of depicting events precisely as they occurred, or identifying the essence of those events and dramatizing those abstractions.

As art it is not necessary for movies to depict historical events or characters with unerring detailed precision. What is necessary is that the essence of those events or characters be captured. Art is an essentialization, an identification of what is important. What appears on film is the writer's statement of what is important about a particular event or character.

Tombstone and Wyatt Earp are very historically accurate in terms of details and actual events. Each movie is filled with scenes and dialogue which any student of Wyatt Earp would appreciate for its historical precision. But the writers have not identified the essence of Wyatt Earp, and the result is an unessentialized series of scenes which add up to a mockery of the historical figure. Each fails miserably, not because of the historical facts they portray, but because of the premise which underlies both movies-- Naturalism.

As a school, Naturalism holds that man does not possess the faculty of choice, that man's actions are caused by forces outside of his control. Our values are forced upon us, by nature, by God, by society. Man is not a moral being, but a victim of fate. Neither success nor failure are one's responsibility-- we act as we do because we must. Thus, the hero should

not be glorified, and the criminal should not be vilified.

This is precisely the message director and co-writer Lawrence Kasdan conveys in *Wyatt Earp*. Starring Kevin Costner as Wyatt, Kasdan presents a long, rambling tale which starts with Earp's teenage attempt to join the Union army and ends with his middle aged venture to the Alaskan gold fields. The movie has no discernible plot-- Kasdan merely presents a chronological report of Earp's life. Rather than identify and present those events which dramatize the essence of Earp's character, Kasdan simply overwhelms us with concrete events.

As Ayn Rand notes in *The Romantic Manifesto*, the key to understanding a character is his motivation. If we understand his motivation, i.e., his values and premises, we understand why he chooses one course of action rather than another. His actions make sense, because they are a logical result of his ideas.

A Naturalist, who denies volition, holds that man is motivated by something other than his chosen values. Man is simply swept along by the winds of chance, the will of God, or something similar.

Kasdan makes it clear what motivates Wyatt. Early in the movie, we see Nicholas Earp (Wyatt's father) lecturing his children on the importance of family. "Nothing counts so much as blood," he tells them. "All the rest are strangers." At the time the family jokes about having heard this message "a hundred times". Nicholas Earp does not make an argument for his often repeated claim-- it is asserted as a self-evident fact which Wyatt accepts. At no time do we see him question his father, and he makes only one exception to this creed-- Doc Holliday.

In one scene, after the brothers have moved to Tombstone, the brothers are discussing their business ventures. One

of the wives asks Wyatt why the brothers are his only consideration, why the wives aren't allowed any input. "Wives come and go," he says. "They run off. They die." They are, he implies, strangers and not a part of the family. Even wives are not "blood".

Logically, if this premise is true of the Earp family, it must also be true of the Clantons and McLaureys. If devotion to one's family is inherent, the nature of one's family is irrelevant. If the good guys aren't responsible for their actions, if their actions are not tied to moral values, then neither are the bad guys. Indeed, if individuals can't choose their values, classifications such as good and bad are arbitrary. Morality involves choice; Naturalism denies choice.

Following the gunfight with the Clantons at OK Corral, Sheriff Johnnie Behan, an ally of the Clantons, seeks to arrest the Earps and Holliday. Rather than depict a confrontation between good and evil, between men on opposite sides of the law, we are presented with the spectacle of the law representing both sides. The town Marshal and his deputies-- the Earps-- on one side, and Sheriff Behan on the other.

In the Naturalistic world of Wyatt Earp, there is no right or wrong, moral or immoral. Men act as they must, and their actions should not be judged. When the Earps claim that the Clantons are hiding behind Behan's badge, the audience is simultaneously presented with the same claim against the Earps. Indeed, at one point Holliday remarks that Wyatt is both a Marshal and an outlaw.

This is the dead end of Naturalism's amorality. Rather than

project heroes, it makes no distinction between a lawman and an outlaw, between self-defense and murder. The men who defend the lives and property of productive citizens are no better or worse than those who defend the lives and "property" of cattle rustlers and killers.

Shortly after OK Corral, Morgan is assassinated and Virgil's arm nearly blown off as the remaining Clantons and their friends seek revenge. The Earps decide to flee Tombstone and join their father in California. But Wyatt does not join the family. Instead, he tells Doc that he wants to "kill them all," and he promptly sets out to accomplish that task, searching the countryside for those he suspects attacked his brothers.

When he finds them, he kills them. There is no talk of justice, and no attempt to capture the suspects alive and bring them to trial. Kasdan makes no distinction between Earp's actions and those of the Clanton gang, each seeks revenge for the deaths of family members. After killing the first suspect in Morgan's murder, Wyatt tells Virgil, "That's one for Morgan." We see two warring gangs, each seeking revenge for the deaths of family members.

Historically, Wyatt Earp did hunt down those he suspected of being involved in the murder of Morgan. And he did kill them with no attempt to bring them to trial. But there is another part to the story which Kasdan omits, a part which explains and justifies Earp's actions.

While Kasdan makes it clear that Sheriff Behan is a corrupt lackey of the outlaws, the scope of his corruption is minimized. Outside of Tombstone, southeast Arizona

was virtually lawless during this period. The outlaws stole cattle from Mexico and from American ranchers with virtual impunity. They regularly robbed stagecoaches and trains without punishment. In Behan's jurisdiction, the law went unenforced.

Following the murder of Morgan Earp, the federal government intervened, appointing Wyatt U. S. Marshal and giving him warrants for those he hunted down. Those warrants did not require that the suspects be brought to trial-- they were for their capture, dead or alive. Further, Wells Fargo and Company, Southern Pacific Railroad, and citizens of Cochise County donated \$15,000 for expenses.

Thus, in truth Wyatt's actions were not solely those of a vengeful brother, but also those of a lawman carrying out his legal responsibilities. While we may question Earp's actions, he was not the reckless vigilante presented in the movie.

Kasdan does not explicitly condemn Earp. Instead, he shows that even heroes have flaws, that they are actually "human". While it is true that Wyatt Earp had character flaws, those flaws paled in comparison to his virtue. By including these flaws, the writer states that they are an important aspect of Earp's character, that those flaws are part of what defines him. As Ayn Rand noted, "In life one ignores the unimportant; in art one omits it."

These deviations from the historical truth are not mere lapses, but purposeful actions on the part of the film makers. Lawrence Kasdan is a well-known and successful director, and he knew precisely what he was doing.

In contrast to the film, the efforts of Wyatt Earp put an end to organized criminal activities in south-eastern Arizona. He brought law and justice to that region, and that is what the movies should depict.

Starring Kurt Russell as Wyatt Earp and Val Kilmer as Doc Holliday, *Tombstone* succumbs to the same Naturalistic premises. Rich in historical detail, the movie depicts many of the same events seen in Wyatt Earp and has the same basic theme. But *Tombstone* goes further, depicting Wyatt as confused and non-purposeful, while projecting the self-destructive Holliday as intelligent, insightful, and sophisticated.

We are introduced to Holliday near the beginning of the movie. A dispute over a card game results in Holliday stabbing a man to death. While the act appears to be self-defense, Holliday retreats from the saloon with the intention of fleeing town with Kate. But simple retreat is not enough. On his way past the faro table, Holliday stops to rob the dealer, adding robbery to his list of "accomplishments". When we next see Doc, he is being warmly greeted by Wyatt in *Tombstone*. The friendship between the legendary lawman and the indisputable thief is never explained, and yet is a central aspect of the movie.

Wyatt's uncertainty and Doc's sophistication are clearly depicted in two scenes early in the movie. In the first, the Earps are standing outside on a clear night, looking at the stars. Morgan Earp asks Wyatt if he believes in God. Wyatt stammers, "Yeh. Maybe. Hell, I don't know."

"Well what happens when you die?" Morgan responds.

"Something. Nothing. Hell, I

don't know."

Morgan then proceeds to tell Wyatt of a book he has read on spiritualism. When people die, he says, they see a bright light, which some think is the light leading you to heaven.

What about hell? Wyatt jokingly asks. Do they have a sign there?

The only reference I found in regard to such an incident was in Stuart Lake's book, *Wyatt Earp: Frontier Marshal*. In that book, Wyatt is quoted as saying that he and Morgan had a similar discussion camping in the desert. During that discussion, Wyatt flatly rejected Morgan's suggestion. Rather than show a confident and certain Wyatt, the scene depicts him as confused and uncertain.

In the next scene, the Earps and Holliday are at the faro table. Wyatt is the dealer for the popular game when the notorious outlaws Johnny Ringo and "Curly Bill" Brocius approach the table. Ringo and Holliday, both men of considerable reputation as killers, exchange insults in Latin. Doc turns to Kate and remarks, "Mr. Ringo appears to be an educated man. Now I know I hate him."

Ringo pulls his pistol and holds the barrel at Holliday's forehead. Smiling, he returns the gun to his holster and then abruptly pulls it again and begins a display of gun handling prowess. When he is done, the crowd applauds as all eyes turn to see Doc's response. Doc drains the last of the whiskey from the small tin cup in his hand, and then begins twirling the cup on his finger, mocking Ringo.

In these few minutes we see Wyatt unable to respond to such a fundamental issue as belief in God, while Holliday is able to converse in

a foreign language. From this scene on, Holliday is depicted as the sophisticated, while Wyatt stumbles along, confused and often purposeless.

After Morgan and Virgil are attacked, the Earps choose to leave Tombstone. Ike Clanton and Frank Stillwell follow the family to Tucson, with the intention of killing them. At the train station, Wyatt kills Stillwell, and tells Clanton to carry a message back to his colleagues: "I see a red sash [worn by members of Clanton's gang], I kill the man wearing it." Wyatt makes no pretense of his intention-- those wearing a red sash deserve to die.

As in *Wyatt Earp*, what ensues is a manhunt in which many are gunned down. But in *Tombstone* an attempt is made to explain this as a matter of justice. After a shootout in which Curly Bill is killed, a member of the party remarks to Doc that if it had been his brothers, he'd want revenge too. Make no mistake, Doc says, it's not revenge that Wyatt is seeking, but the reckoning. But aside from this one remark, the movie presents no evidence to support Holliday's claim. Again, the warrants which Wyatt carries are not mentioned.

As Wyatt is cleaning up the countryside, Ringo arranges a showdown with the Marshal. As he prepares for the shoot out, which he believes he will lose, Wyatt confesses to Doc that he has never known what he wanted out of life. What makes a man like Ringo, he asks Doc.

"A man like Ringo got a great empty hole right through the middle of him. He can never kill enough, or steal enough, or inflict enough pain to fill it."

"What's he need?"

"Revenge."

"For what?"

"For being born."

Holliday, who is bedridden and appears to be dying, asks Wyatt if he can wear his badge. But Doc has faked the seriousness of his illness, and he beats Wyatt to Johnny Ringo. The fight will be legal, he tells Ringo, because Doc is now wearing the Marshal's badge. Wyatt reaches the site as Ringo dies from Holliday's gun. Doc places the badge on Ringo's chest. "My hypocrisy only goes so far," he tells Wyatt.

The movie depicts Holliday as a man who understands the motivation of both Earp and Ringo, i.e., of good and evil. Yet he rejects justice, calling himself a hypocrite for killing in the name of the law. Thus, the man who most clearly understands the fundamental issues involved acts contrary to his own understanding. And the man who is acting in the name of justice does not understand his own values or motivation.

Again the historical truth is considerably different and we must question why the writers would make such changes. Doc Holliday was a horrible shot, and Wyatt Earp was regarded as one of the best of his time. By rearranging the facts, the writers create the impression that Holliday was the confident marksman. Furthermore, Holliday was a Deputy Marshal under Wyatt, and therefore did not consider it hypocrisy to enforce the law.

Made earlier this century, when better premises and values dominated, *Gunfight at OK Corral* stars Burt Lancaster as Wyatt Earp and Kirk Douglas as Doc Holliday. From the beginning, Lancaster's Earp is a man dedicated to justice. We do not see arbitrary

events from his life, but a grown, confident man. He enters the town of Griffin on the trail of Ike Clanton and Johnny Ringo. Wyatt has telegraphed Sheriff Cotton Wilson, an old friend of Wyatt's, to hold the men. But Wilson has permitted the fugitives to continue on their way, telling Wyatt, "I got no quarrel with Ike Clanton." Wilson further justifies his reluctance to get involved by citing his long career as a lawman and the lack of material wealth he possesses. The same will happen to you, he tells Wyatt.

Disappointed that his old friend has become an ally of outlaws, Wyatt must turn to Doc Holliday for information regarding Clanton and Ringo. Holliday, a former dentist who is now a professional gambler, greets Wyatt by remarking that if he had known Wyatt would become a lawman, he wouldn't have been so kind when he pulled Earp's tooth years ago. Wyatt expresses similar contempt for Holliday's chosen profession.

Wyatt tells Doc that Ed Bailey, who is waiting for Doc in a saloon, has a small derringer in his left boot. Holliday uses Wyatt's tip to defend himself when Ed Bailey reaches for the pistol. As Bailey lies dead with a knife in his chest, Holliday is placed under house arrest. Kate Fisher, Doc's lover, pleads with Wyatt to intervene. Wyatt responds that she should "let the law handle it." An angry mob forms to hang Holliday and Kate again pleads with Wyatt to save Doc. "It don't matter whether Doc is right or wrong. He don't deserve to be hung by a pack of animals," she says.

Wyatt helps Doc escape. "I didn't think you liked me," Holliday tells Wyatt.

"Don't take it personal, Doc,"

Wyatt replies, "I just don't like lynchings."

This emphasizes the movie's theme of justice. Kate correctly states that Doc's innocence or guilt is not the issue when a mob lynching is about to take place. Justice demands a particular process, and that process was about to be denied. Wyatt recognized this. He had witnessed the killing, which was clearly an act of self-defense. But he did not attempt to intervene when Doc was arrested-- he wanted to let the judicial process take place, but when he saw it about to be denied, he did intervene.

Doc soon arrives in Dodge City (where Wyatt is an officer), with the intention of thanking Wyatt "properly" for his aid. Wyatt intends to run Holliday out of town, but Doc responds by offering to split his gambling winnings with Wyatt if Earp will loan him the tool of his trade, money. Impressed by Doc's confidence, Wyatt agrees, on the condition that there are "no knives, no guns, no killings." Doc gives his word, and for the first time we see hints of a budding friendship. Each man acknowledges that he likes the other's "cut", i.e., character.

When they first meet in the movie, each has made an evaluation of the other. But each reexamines his evaluation as he is confronted with new facts about the other. Wyatt sees that Doc is a brave man who does not run from trouble, but doesn't seek it out either. Doc sees that Wyatt is truly concerned with justice. The friendship between the two is justified within the movie, and is another dramatization of justice-- neither grants his friendship promiscuously.

Unlike *Tombstone* and *Wyatt Earp, OK Corral* does not present

the feud between the Earps and the Clanton gang primarily as a dispute between two families. *OK Corral* makes it clear that the Clantons are upset because Wyatt is interfering with their operations. They plot to murder him while he makes his nightly rounds. That evening, one of Wyatt's brothers volunteers to make the rounds, and he becomes the Clanton's victim. The scene is set for the confrontation in the OK Corral.

Cotton Wilson, who is now the corrupt Sheriff of Cochise County, stands with the Clantons as the Earps approach. When he asks Ike Clanton to allow him to leave, Ike barks out an order, which Wilson dutifully obeys. The exchange makes it clear that the outlaw is in charge. When Wilson attempts to flee, Ike shoots him in the back.

Thus, the gunfight at OK Corral becomes something other than merely a shootout between two gangs. It's an act of justice in which lawmen stand up to outlaws and a corrupt sheriff. While Wyatt is not portrayed as a man of ideas, he does not have the confusion and character flaws of the later movies.

Ironically, few of the events in *Gunfight at OK Corral* occurred precisely as they are depicted, yet it is the most historically accurate of the movies. By essentializing Earp's character and dramatizing that, *Gunfight at the OK Corral* is the more historically accurate movie (in terms of fundamentals). The Naturalistic movies depict Wyatt Earp as a man who was partly good, and partly bad, rather than the defender of justice he truly was.

Wyatt Earp was a truly remarkable man. He was dedicated to the rule of law at time when lawlessness abounded. He brought civilization to an uncivilized region, and demanded that men act as men. To depict him any differently is to mock the one virtue most synonymous with his name -- justice.

Minimum Wage an Attack on Freedom

by J. Brian Phillips

(The following article appeared on the OpEd page of the Houston Chronicle on November 28, 1995.)

As the owner of a small business, I face many obstacles and threats to the well-being of my company. Now I face a new threat-- the voters of Houston.

The proposal by local labor union leaders to hold a referendum on increasing the minimum wage in Houston to \$6.50 per hour is an attack on my freedom. Indeed, it is also an attack on the freedom of my employees and potential employees, and the freedom of every productive Houstonian.

To understand this, consider exactly what the proposed law means. This law would force-- not suggest, not encourage, but force-- employers to pay a minimum of \$6.50 per hour, regardless of the economic consequences. Violators would be subject to fines of up to \$200 per day per worker.

Thus, I could become a criminal for no reason other than offering a job to an unskilled high school dropout for \$6 per hour. I could have my business destroyed by offering an opportunity to a young man or woman.

The wages I pay are based upon an employee's productive ability, i.e., the skills he possesses. An individual who can competently operate an

airless paint sprayer is more productive than one who can only use a brush, and therefore, I pay such individuals more. An individual who can execute sheet rock repairs is more valuable than an individual who possesses no skills.

The proposed law is an attempt to deny the fact that higher wages must be earned by increased productivity. It is an attempt to "create" wealth through legislation. If this were possible, why not make everyone rich by raising the minimum wage to \$50 per hour? The truth is that wealth is not, and cannot be, created in this manner.

By forcing employers to pay arbitrarily higher wages, the proposed law would deny opportunities to workers with the lowest skills. It would prevent those workers from learning and developing the skills necessary to earn higher wages. In fact, the proposed law is an attempt to gain the unearned-- to increase wages when skillshavenot increased. Which means, employers will be compelled to pay more than a particular position is worth.

The American system of law was created to protect an individual's right to produce and trade values. This is the only proper purpose of government-- protecting the rights of citizens to engage in peaceful, voluntary activities.

The proposed law would turn government from a

protector of rights to a violator of rights. By prohibiting employers and low-skilled workers from agreeing to any wage under \$6.50 per hour, the law forces those individuals to act contrary to their judgment and mutual self-interest. Rather than allow individuals to act voluntarily, according to their own values, the law would declare certain actions-- while voluntary and a violation of nobody's rights-- illegal.

Any law which restricts the peaceful activities of individuals empowers some at the expense of others. Such laws impose undeserved penalties and award unearned benefits. For example, this proposal would give minimum wage workers a raise they have not earned, while arbitrarily imposing higher costs on employers.

That labor union leaders seek to obtain public approval for their proposal does not change this. It simply makes voters co-conspirators in an immoral scheme to deprive employers and low-skilled workers of their rights. The support of a majority does not make an idea true or proper. An individual's rights are not subject to a public vote.

If rights were a matter of public approval, then nobody's rights would be safe. The rights of any individual could be revoked simply by vote, and the realm of politics would be transformed into a constant struggle to convince voters that one's cause serves the "public interest". If rights were subject to a referendum, one could never be certain that what is legal today makes one a criminal tomorrow.

The truth is that the public interest can only be served by

protecting the rights of the individuals who comprise the public. Those rights are not a matter of one's race, gender, or economic status; they apply to all individuals equally. To invoke the cause of "public interest" while violating individual rights is a fraud.

Rather than turn city government into a clash between competing "interests", we must identify and protect the one interest which every individual shares-- the need and right to be free to pursue his own values without interference from others. This is the meaning of individual rights, and government's only proper purpose is to protect this right.

Those who support the proposal to raise Houston's minimum wage to \$6.50 have dismissed objections to their proposal, claiming that increasing the minimum wage would actually benefit employers. I greatly resent the arrogance of those who believe that they have a right to compel me to act contrary to my own judgment, and then justify their actions by claiming that I will benefit. Forcing me to act in my own "benefit" is a gross contradiction.

Initiating force against citizens who have not violated the rights of others is a crime. That duly elected officials, acting with the public's approval, are the instigators of such acts does not change that fact.

HOS Meeting Summary

by Sean M. Rainer

Humor was the topic of discussion at the year's first HOS meeting. The meeting was held in the clubroom of Kirk Mashue's apartment building and Warren and David Willens provided refreshments.

Chris presented his working theory of humor. What is it? What role does it play? Is it a philosophical issue, and if so, where does it fall hierarchically?

The nature of humor, according to Chris, is the contrast between the sensical and the non-sensical.

The key word in this definition is "contrast." Indeed, the measure of humor is this contrast. However, as the definition suggests, not any contrast will do.

The source of humor lies in the fact that one is expecting the sensical. The non-sensical is unexpected, thus, the theory suggests, it is humorous.

As Chris was quick to point out, there is somewhat of a problem here with our terminology. The word humor, as Chris uses it, does not mean funny. It is entirely possible for something to be classified as humor yet not be the least bit funny. This does not mean that anything can be considered humor. There must exist the sensical/non-sensical contrast.

Humor comes in many different forms of course: wordplay, parody, sarcasm, etc.

But at their root, all of these involve a contrast between what we expect and what we are given: again, the sensical versus the non-sensical.

Using Leonard Peikoff's analogy of epistemology to a house,

Chris labels humor as the "game room." In this way, humor is after the ante-room and the main rooms, but still part of the house. In fact, your understanding of humor and even your particular sense of humor relies on the knowledge gained in the main rooms.

Humor obviously has many psychological aspects as well. Humans have a capacity for humor and do find pleasure in it. What, then, is its purpose. Chris offers this theory: humor is mental exercise. Humor gives one the opportunity to exercise one's ability to make sense of the world. Because humor is the contrast between sensible and non-sensical, "getting" a joke depends on one's ability to recognize what makes sense, i.e. what the world is really like, versus some non-sensical aspect.

The pleasure we get from humor is not unlike the pleasure obtained

from exercising one's body. There is a certain satisfaction in recognizing one's capabilities, mentally or physically, and achieving them.

Other topics of discussion at the meeting included the existence of irrational humor, humor fatigue (i.e. old jokes), and the integration of humor and art.

For many HOS members this was the second exposure to Chris's theory as he presented what he considers a less than perfect version of the theory several years ago at TOSC. While he says that his theory, as it stands, is superior to that first presentation of it, he admits that there is still much work to be done.

Intellectual Activism

On January 21, 1996 Dale Schwartz called The Jon Matthews Show on KPRC Radio. Earlier in the week Mr. Matthews had expressed his belief that each of us has "a moral and spiritual obligation" to help those less fortunate. Dale called to disagree with Mr. Matthews.

Dale pointed out that Matthews was surrendering the moral high ground to liberals and providing the justification for their welfare programs. Matthews disagreed, arguing that religious principles were not a matter of debate.

Dale attempted to respond, but was interrupted several times before Matthews cut him off the air.

Matthews is a popular conservative talk show host, and Dale's call let listener's know that altruism is not universally accepted.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

\$ As of January 2, 1996 Leonard Peikoff's radio program on KIEV in Los Angeles will air daily, rather once a week. Tapes are available from Second Renaissance Book Service.

\$ At the last HOS meeting a change was made in the 1996 meeting schedule. The April meeting, which was to have featured a speaker from ARI has been moved to August, and a video tape of Leonard Peikoff's Ford Hall Forum lecture, "Philosophy and the Real World Out There" will now be played in April.

\$ Kedran Garrison, winner of The Fountainhead essay contest, sent the following note: "I wish to thank all involved for the very generous awards that the Houston Objectivism Society provides. I was quite surprised to receive The Fountainhead award, and it has been extremely helpful to me this past semester. I appreciate the generosity of the Houston Objectivism Society. Thank you again, and best wishes in the new year."

\$ HOS and Sean Rainer would like to thank J. P. Miller for providing a scholarship for Sean to the Houston Lyceum.