

Houston Objectivism Society Newsletter

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Passion, Independence and Volition in *The Last of the Mohicans*

by Neil Erian

Through the cynicism of modern film heroes--almost blood brothers to the villains--bursts a radiant light in *The Last of the Mohicans*. This film is a masterpiece that presents in sound, cinematography, and action man as he might be and ought to be. *Time* and *Newsweek* used "grand scale" and "passion[ate]" to describe what society magazines like *National Review* and *New Yorker* called "silly" and "inane." Whatever their conclusions, none of the movie reviewers identified systematically or in-depth how and why the film evoked in many an intense passion. Conforming to modern trends they praised the director's ability to make the hero palatable to the MTV generation. If themes were identified, they were brought up only in isolation. The treachery of the Indians, the passion between Hawkeye and Cora, and the political conflict within the colonies--all crucial to grasping the film's theme--were left disintegrated.

Being rational individuals, however, we can simply swat aside the superficiality of modern reviews, and experience first-hand a universe with the power to bring out the best within us. In creating this passionate epic, director Michael Mann has expressed man's greatest emotion-- exaltation-- and dramatized it in a love story about

"the last of a vanishing people." The purpose of this article is to demonstrate the unity of Mann's universe and passion for values.

The movie opens during the French and Indian Wars in the Hudson River Valley in 1757 with three men--Hawkeye, his adoptive father, Chingachgook, and brother Uncas--in pursuit of a majestic elk. They are heading west for winter in Kentucky.

Nearby, British Major Duncan Hayward and the daughters of Colonel Munro, Cora and Alice, head through a winding, narrow glade to Fort Henry. A local Indian named Magua is hired to serve as their guide. Suddenly, Magua attacks their British detachment, signaling a Huron onslaught from the surrounding forest. Overtaking the Huron war party, the three hunters leap from the forest's edge--covered with dead British soldiers--to quell the fray. They rescue the British travelers, but Magua escapes. Hawkeye, Chingachgook, and Uncas agree to escort the sisters and the major to Fort Henry.

During the journey amidst violent Indians, Hawkeye and Cora, who is tentatively engaged to Duncan, begin to fall in love. They reach Fort Henry, under siege by the advancing French army. Hawkeye advises the desperate Colonel Munro and his colonial mili-

Identifying Context Workshop

At the June HOS meeting Brian Phillips will present a workshop titled "Identifying context."

The workshop will include an examination of the crucial importance of context, how the context determines the meaning of knowledge, as well as the skills necessary to successfully identify context. The workshop will include a number of exercises to help attendees practice those skills.

Those planning to attend the meeting should read pages 121-128 in *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand*.

The meeting will be held on June 8 at 6:30 p.m. at the Clubroom of The Meridian apartment complex, 6263 Westheimer (between Hillcroft and Fountainview), across from Payless Shoes.

NOTE: We are asking each member who attends to contribute \$2 to help pay for the expenses of renting this clubroom. We have not been recovering rental costs, and would like to encourage those who have not been contributing to do so. In addition, in an effort to reduce club expenses, those attending are asked to bring snack items.

tiamen of Indian war parties attacking colonial settlements. Immovably loyal to the Crown, Duncan refuses to corroborate Hawkeye's account. Colonel Munro rejects the militia's request, already authorized by General Webb, to leave and defend their families. Downhearted over the situation, Cora rejects Duncan's offer of marriage. Meanwhile, Hawkeye secretly helps the colonials to escape, but chooses to remain behind with Cora. Colonel Munro jails Hawkeye for sedition, and sentences him to be hanged.

Lacking General Webb's reinforcements, Colonel Munro accepts a mutual peace agreement with France, and surrenders Fort Henry. But the Huron, allied to the French, break the French and English peace. On their way to Fort Edward, Colonel Munro's battle-weary troops are attacked from the surrounding forest by hordes of Hurons, led by Magua. Hawkeye, Uncas, and Chingachgook, with Cora and Alice, find a nearby canoe, and escape across the lake and down the river. They are followed by the jealous, vengeful Duncan Hayward, and pursued by the bloodthirsty Magua, who seeks to kill Colonel Munro's daughters for the destruction of his own family by the British.

Their escape reaches a dead end at a thundering waterfall. Out of gunpowder, Hawkeye, Uncas, and Chingachgook are forced to jump into the river, leaving the sisters and the major behind. Magua arrives with his men, and takes Cora, Alice, and Duncan prisoner. Downstream, Hawkeye, Uncas, and Chingachgook reach the shore, and track them to a Huron village. During Magua's pris-

oner report to chief Sachem, Hawkeye asks Duncan to translate his request to Sachem that the British be set free. Sachem orders Alice to become Magua's new wife, Cora to be burned at the stake, and Duncan to be returned to the British army. Hawkeye vehemently bids to take Cora's place. In Hawkeye's stead Duncan offers his own life, which Sachem accepts. The Hurons direct Cora into Hawkeye's arms, and grab Duncan. Hawkeye and Cora quickly leave for the village outskirts. From there Hawkeye aims his musket at Duncan, who is agonizing in the inferno, and kills him.

Magua and his men escape, taking Alice. Uncas pursues them and battles Magua hand-to-hand on the cliff's edge. Magua kills Uncas. To avenge Uncas, Chingachgook kills Magua. Thereafter, he mourns his Mohican son, and Hawkeye and Cora are together again.

The above summary of the movie's main action should make the plot-theme evident. An intransigent man who has fallen in love with an English woman must confront those involved in the war between Britain and France. In this conflict are four main characters: the white adopted son of the Mohicans, Hawkeye, the English woman, Cora, the British officer, Duncan Hayward, and the Huron, Magua. By observing their purposes and actions, we can isolate a deeper aspect of the conflict and reach the abstract theme.

Hawkeye is an efficacious man who values his freedom. Though he determinedly sets his sight and direction for winter in Kentucky, Hawkeye readily alters his course for the sake

of important values: defending the freedom of his colonial friends and seeking out the woman he loves. Without hesitation Hawkeye risks his life, being opposed all along the way by savage Indians and dogmatic British officers. Hawkeye is loyal to his values, and solidly determined--amidst dire circumstances--to achieve them.

Cora heroically adheres, in the face of mixed emotions, to her own judgment. Until the discord at Fort Henry, between the colonial militia and Colonel Munro, Cora is torn between relying on her own judgment and that of Duncan and her father. Seeing their treatment of Hawkeye and the colonials, Cora openly rejects their hypocrisy and placement of British interests above facts and justice. To Duncan Cora avows that she would rather make the gravest of errors in choosing a husband than abdicate her judgment. With confidence she accuses Duncan of lying and her father of unjustly jailing Hawkeye. Cora courageously upholds truth and justice against those who discard them.

Duncan Hayward is committed to defeating France, and to maintaining the Crown's hegemony over the American colonies. Duncan's basic view, that "British policies make the world England," is expressed in his subordination of others to the standards of the British Crown. Regarding all Indians as savages, Duncan carelessly supposes Chingachgook to be an enemy Huron attacker. Further, Duncan deliberately under-

mines Hawkeye's judgment, sacrificing colonial defense for the sake of the doomed Fort Henry, and unjustly causing Hawkeye's incarceration. Finally, as Hawkeye leads their escape from the Hurons, Duncan still threatens to hang him. Duncan's impertinence is even expressed in his suggestion to Cora that their friendship is a reasonable basis for marriage. Though Cora is unsure of her feelings, Duncan is confident that she can rely on others to decide for her. He "know[s] that in [his] heart [they] will be the most marvelous couple in London" and that, in time, their love will develop. Accordingly, the conflict between Hawkeye and himself will "matter not at all" back in England. British chauvinism lays at the heart of Duncan's standard for truth, justice, and romantic love.

Magua, the brutal Huron, is on a bloody crusade to avenge the destruction of his family at the hands of the British. In relentless pursuit of the innocent Cora and Alice Munro, Magua pretends to be Mohawk, allied to the British, betrays the peace agreement of his French allies, and kills hundreds of British soldiers. Magua perpetrates as much treachery and destruction as necessary to achieve his revenge. Ultimately, he wants the Huron to become as strong as the whites.

In considering the characterization we must ask whether there is a basic connection between Hawkeye's determined pursuit of his own values,

Cora's resolve to achieve autonomy, and the colonial settlers' courageous struggle to live 'beholden to none' on the frontier. It is crucial to recognize that their conflicts arise as their lives become enmeshed in the war between the Europeans and Indians. In that conflict, Duncan Hayward and Colonel Munro are fighting against France to maintain Britain's hegemony over the colonies, while the bloodthirsty Magua is on a war path to avenge his family, and to achieve brute mastery over the whites. From these particulars we can abstract the theme of *The Last of the Mohicans*: the struggle for independence in the new American colonies amidst forces of brutality and injustice.

Thus, the wider conflict lies in the realm of politics. It is a conflict between those who seek political freedom for survival on the American frontier and those who seek control and mastery over others as an end in itself. It is a conflict between individuals who choose their course first-hand and second-handed men, who presumptuously act to control them, all the while relying on the independent judgment of the very men they wish to control. Throughout the main action, Hawkeye is first-handed and Duncan Hayward is second-handed. On the trek to Fort Henry, Duncan presumes Hawkeye to be a scout in service to the Crown. At the devastated colonial settlement Duncan asserts that the bodies be buried, but Hawkeye knows that such action is dangerous to their security.

Throughout their journey, Duncan relies on Hawkeye's judgment. However, when they reach Fort Henry, Duncan safely and vigorously opposes Hawkeye, with the force of the Crown. Then, during their escape from the Huron, Duncan aims his pistol at Hawkeye and threatens to hang him, just before conforming to Hawkeye's lead. When they reach the waterfall, Duncan accuses Hawkeye of cowardice, as Hawkeye courageously hurls himself into the falls, knowing that the only chance for survival is to leave Cora, Alice, and Duncan behind. Thus, we can observe that Duncan is completely dependent on Hawkeye's foresight and plan of action. Yet, Duncan's brashness continually threatens Hawkeye, Cora, and the colonials, as well as himself.

Ironically, this attribute appears to be the root of Duncan's climactic act to save Hawkeye and Cora. How else would a man, who views himself as superior to Hawkeye, and who despises Cora's love for Hawkeye, give his life for them as surely as for the Crown? On the other hand, how could Cora, who despises Duncan for unjustly imperiling Hawkeye's life, cry out for him as he is dragged to the Hurons' sacrificial fire? How could anyone be moved by the life of a second-handed destroyer in exchange for the lives of independent valuers? Dramatically and emotionally this is the climax of the movie. As such, we must ask if there is a deeper significance to the central conflict, not apparent in the main

action, that can explain the meaning of this pivotal scene.

This deeper conflict is dramatized in the central characters by their basic relationship to the world. Magua is a scheming, expert woodsman whose protection and base of attack is the cover of darkness, i.e., in the guise of an ally or from the dense forest. On a different level of destruction is Duncan Hayward, inept to the demands of the frontier, and heedless to circumstances which, if he saw them, would cause him to act differently. Duncan's ignorance is induced by his willful rejection of an environment that is unyielding to his British conventions. Duncan's fighting style-- suitable in a European campaign-- is ineffective in the American frontier.

The clash between these two archetypes of destruction is vividly dramatized in the battle between the Huron and Colonel Munro's troops. Dressed in bright red garb, and heedless to potential danger, Munro's army marches through a peaceful glade. When the Huron onslaught erupts, the forest comes alive, engulfing the soldiers in chaos. Here we see the two sides of a mind-body dualism. On the one hand Magua and the Indians are experienced woodsmen, but subject to a blind hatred of whites. Totally rejecting their minds, their only firm commitment is to mindless savagery. On the other hand, Duncan and the British army regard the real world as immaterial and their surroundings as inconsequential. Thus, they do not adapt their fighting style to their surroundings. In-

stead, they believe that the Crown can impose its will the world over, that the Crown's desires have primacy over reality.

Hawkeye is attuned to the nature of his surroundings and the alternatives possible to him. His tracking expertise, fighting ability, and far-reaching aim reduce the natural and man-made forces opposing him to mere aberrations in his course. Hawkeye never abandons his values or stops thinking, even under the Crown's sentence of death. It is Hawkeye's unity of mind and body, his unwavering commitment to reality, that drives the forces of love and destruction to a head at the movie's climax.

In order to fully appreciate the climax, it is crucial to recognize Duncan's disunity, and that he embodies the movie's deeper conflict of love and destruction. Though Duncan is second-handed in his dependence on Hawkeye for survival, he is not a sniveling, toadying coward; he is not Peter Keating in uniform. Openly critical of General Webb, who has deferred to the colonial militia, Duncan boldly declares, "I thought that British policies make the world England... sir" Throughout the siege at Fort Henry, Duncan freely speaks his mind, so much so, that it almost seems that he is in charge. When the French General urges Colonel Munro to surrender, and guarantees safe passage from the fort, Duncan urges Munro not to surrender. He tells Colonel Munro that "[General] Webb can burn in hell!" for not supporting them,

Mazzone Speaks in New Mexico

and that they will dig their graves at Fort Henry. Thus, Duncan's first allegiance is to the glory and will of the Crown, which he attempts to impose on the war between Britain and France, as well as on Cora and the colonial frontier. In all his actions, Duncan's deepest love is an ideal divorced from the facts.

However, in Hawkeye's moral condemnation of Magua at the Huron village, Duncan is confronted face-to-face with reality. Until the destructive nature of his code is revealed, Duncan remains morally self-confident, however inefficient. At the Huron village, Duncan finally sees his own moral vacuum and Hawkeye's real and noble stature, with which Cora has fallen in love. Duncan saves them both, in a solemn act of independent judgment and love. In Duncan's act lies the key to the movie's deeper meaning, that love and destruction cannot co-exist within the same man, and that a man must choose one or the other. The culminating scene at the Huron village is an impassioned, dramatic defense of human free-will, of the power to choose whether to be driven by blind hatred, by ideas cut-off from reality, or by reality and values. This last is what Duncan finally chooses.

The source of Duncan's predicament and his tragic end is a reality that is resistant to his Platonic ideal. Heroically,

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On April 19 Michael Mazzone spoke in Albuquerque, New Mexico on zoning. His talk was arranged by Association of Objectivist Businessmen member Pat Powell.

The attendees were mostly business people with businesses in a light industrial area that some want to "return to its rural flavor." The area looks like Old Spanish Trail east of Alameda in Houston--i.e., machine shops, auto repair shops, etc.

The former Mayor of Albuquerque also attended. He is a current member of Albuquerque's zoning and planning commission. He was the lone dissenter to Michael's remarks.

The purpose of Michael's speech was to motivate the business owners to the fight for the right to property. Michael explained that right, its importance and its relation to all other rights. He also emphasized that it is absolute and that one could not fight for it and allow exceptions to it at the same time.

Michael explained the alternatives to zoning: deed restrictions and nuisance laws. He presented a plan of action: Elect people who respect property rights and hold them to be absolute; run out of office (actually "target" like the Christian coalition does) those people who don't swear to uphold property rights without exception. If there are no good candidates, then recruit some-- find people who will uphold property rights and are willing to run.

Michael also laid out a long term plan for stripping the local

governments of the power to zone: Repeal the state zoning statute, an incredibly difficult task given the number of statist in New Mexico.

Michael specifically said that in fighting for one's rights individuals must do more than listen to some guy from Houston speak.

The former Mayor told Michael he ran for zoning commissioner so he could control the no-growth crowd. He also said that under his leadership the commission had granted a number of variances, exceptions, etc. Michael replied that people should not have to grovel before him for permission to use their own property and that rights should not depend upon the goodwill of any particular officeholder.

The crowd was most impressed by the fact that Houston has no zoning, combined with the many top ten lists on which Houston appears. The Greater Houston Partnership published a promotion about Houston which included all the lists on which Houston ranked very high, such as lowest housing costs, best place to start and run a minority business, etc. The best way to sum up the reaction was: WOW!!

The former Mayor argued that Albuquerque didn't start with large tracts of land, as was done in Houston, and thus zoning was necessary in Albuquerque. He said his source was his college roommate at the University of Texas at El Paso: Bob Lanier, Houston's current mayor.

In preparation for Michael's talk, Pat distributed more than 100 copies of the pamphlet "Government Vs. Freedom: In Defense of Property Rights."

Peikoff Speaks at Ford Hall Forum

by Jeanne Nicole

On April 21 Dr. Leonard Peikoff spoke at the Ford Hall Forum at Northeastern University in Boston. The title of his speech was "A Philosopher Analyzes The O.J. Verdict."

The trial of O.J. Simpson poignantly illustrates the contradictions of our present legal system, according to Dr. Peikoff. This trial will never become dated, even if O.J. were to someday confess.

The one profession which should have spoken out about the case but didn't was professional philosophers, he said. It is only philosophy which can properly define the epistemological principles that determine what qualifies as reasonable or doubtful when judging evidence.

The O.J. jurors based their decision not on what was reasonable, but on what they felt, and the dominant emotion that they felt was rage. They were out for vengeance for Rodney King, for the L.A. riots, and for blacks against whites in general. The jury's refusal to deliberate, when deliberation is considered an essential part of the judicial process, was a brazen slap in the face of justice.

But this black rage against whites is not confined to the O.J. jurors; it seems to be ubiquitous in the general culture. What is its cause? Whatever it is, it is not past slavery. Black rage was taught to blacks by white intellectuals in white universities, and it originated from a white

philosopher.

In this century, generations of black leaders had endorsed color-blindness, and blacks appeared to have been assimilating into the melting pot of American society. Then in the 1960's the New Left whites came out for drugs and communism, and many black leaders went along with this trend, encouraging a new, virulently anti-intellectual role model for blacks. This set the stage for the rampant racism we all are experiencing today.

The jurors at the O.J. trial claimed they were following the letter of the law concerning reasonable doubt. They were able to claim this because of a gimmick foisted at the trial by the defense team.

In his speech, Dr Peikoff revealed in great detail the methodology used by the defense team throughout the trial to get the verdict they desired.

The gimmick consisted in creating the illusion that an arbitrary assertion could become a legitimate possibility. The defense team deliberately ignored the requirement that some factual evidence is needed to establish every possibility. Unfortunately, neither Judge Ito nor the prosecution was able to counter these tactics successfully, as they lacked the proper epistemology.

Now our nation is in a terrible quandary. Our legal system is gradually becoming an object of disgust in the public's mind.

People are clamoring for

change. What will they do? Dr. Peikoff gave one frightening scenario: Conservatives might try to pass laws to make it easier to get convictions, thereby trampling on individual rights. However, there is a solution to the problem, which he explained at the conclusion of his speech.

During the question period that followed, he answered these and other interesting questions:

Q: Who determines whether Objectivism is the right philosophy?

Q: How do we know whether the reality we see is the correct one?

Q: If you take away the legal right of the poor to guaranteed representation in court, won't more poor people be under-represented and sent to jail unjustly?

Q: What is appropriate moral behavior for a defense attorney?

In his answer to this last, Dr. Peikoff asserted that a defense attorney has a responsibility to use his mind as best he can. He is morally obligated to judge the defendant, and to act according to his judgement.

HOS Meeting Summaries

"Philosophy and the Real World Out There"

April 13, 1996

The April HOS meeting featured a video tape presentation of Dr. Leonard Peikoff's Ford Hall Forum talk titled "Philosophy and the Real World Out There."

In his talk, Dr. Peikoff presented a brief summary of the history of philosophy. He divided the history of philosophy into 4 periods: Greek, Medieval, Modern and Kantian.

The Greeks were dominated by reason, while philosophy during the Medieval period plunged into religious mysticism. The modern era included the Renaissance and the re-discovery of Aristotle. Dr. Peikoff explained how contemporary philosophers have divorced themselves from reality, a direct result of Kant. He concluded his talk by showing how the ideas of Kant influence our culture, including business and politics.

Prior to the meeting, Pamphleteering Chairman Janet Lee Wich organized a mailing of Dr. Peikoff's pamphlet "Health Care is Not a Right." Approximately 500 copies were prepared for mailing.

Space Day

May 11, 1996

by Warren Ross

HOS's May meeting, consisting of a tour of NASA facilities, was both informative and enjoyable. Members visited Space Center Houston (SCH), which is essentially a museum and information center for the space program. In addition to the tram tour provided by SCH, special

"inside" guided tours of Mission Control were given by Paul Hill. Paul is a member of Mission Operations Directorate (MOD), which creates and documents all the procedures that astronauts follow on their missions. On the tour I was on, Paul took us to two control rooms, one on the second floor (that most visitors see) and one on the third floor (which is reserved for training). Instead of seeing the control rooms from behind the glass in the visitors' gallery, which is what happens on the standard tour, we went onto the floor. We could actually punch up the buttons on the consoles where mission controllers worked on all the famous historical missions like Apollo 11. A new control room, in an adjacent building, was more modern and seemed more appropriate to me as the center of space travel, with its newer equipment and sleeker panels, and its neutral gray color (as opposed to the 1960's institutional green of the old control rooms).

One interesting aspect of the way NASA is organized became clear as we visited all the back rooms in Mission Control: Each person in the control room is actually a leader of a team of engineers in another room. This is where all those smart-looking guys in "Apollo 13" hang out when there are no emergencies. The serious side of this, and the epistemologically key one, is that NASA is organized in a highly essentialized way, with each space mission divided up into critical systems (power systems, communications, etc.) and each system divided up into subsystems, with a team of engineers responsible for each subsystem. This hierarchy of subsystems of subsystems continues until there is a

person who knows each chip on each board or each bolt in each cabinet. Each level of the hierarchy consists of a crow-horning number of components.

As with any process of breaking a whole up into components, there is a need for integration to ensure that the components don't separate into disconnected pieces but actually work properly together in space. This is the task of "Operations Integration," a discipline that Chris Land worked in for more than five years and that Paul still works in.

From an Objectivist perspective, NASA is thus organized in a way to obtain advantages from both the differentiation into components and the integration of these components into a working whole. NASA in this way is the epitome of reason. As you look at the way the structure of NASA is designed, and study the documentation manuals and procedural guides at each level (indicating a degree of mission preparedness that is inconceivable to most people), it becomes concretely real how such a gargantuan task as landing a person on a small orb a quarter of a million miles away could be accomplished. I came away from the day with more inspiration to tackle my own complex problems than I could have had from any other experience I can imagine. The best fiction is almost as good as a day at NASA.

After the tour, members had dinner at Tortilla's, a Mexican restaurant near SCH, and a few members socialized at the Land house.

Thanks to Chris Land for organizing Space Day, and to Paul Hill, Neil Erian and Hannes Hacker for helping.

Mohicans

(continued from page 5)

Duncan shouts to Hawkeye, as he is dragged away, "My compliments, sir. Take her, and get out!" Frantic and agonizing, Cora cries "What are they doing to Duncan!" Recognizing Duncan's strength and sovereignty, like the swift and majestic elk, Hawkeye ends his agony, killing him in an act of justice and sympathy.

With the fundamental conflict resolved, the final act of justice necessarily follows. In a benevolent universe, love and destruction cannot coexist. It is either/or; one of them must go. Hence, the meaning of the final

battle on a cliff. It is the meaning of Uncas' single-handed, courageous attempt to save Alice, of Alice's tragically heroic act of self-preservation, of Chingachgook's slaying of Magua. It is the meaning uniting Hawkeye and Cora in the triumph of love over destruction, of independence over dependence, of free-will over determinism, of life over death.

In *The Last of the Mohicans* Hawkeye, Uncas, and Chingachgook are called "the last of a vanishing people." In a deeper sense, Michael Mann is referring to the independent men of the world, the men who choose to recognize reality, who fight for values with their own judgment,

and triumph.

Regardless of whether one accepts his view that such men are necessarily vanishing, Mann's portrayal of heroism allows us to experience the exaltation of human accomplishment, to attain the emotional fuel necessary for our own struggles.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

\$ Brian Phillips and the HOS library recently moved. The new address is 5655 Glenmont #602, Houston TX 77081. The new phone number is 665-2680.

\$ The following quote appears on the back cover of a book titled *From The Trial court to the Supreme Court: Anatomy of a Free Speech Case*: "If you think the P.C. movement is simply trying to change the names we call things, you are wrong. This book proves that the P.C. movement is much more dangerous." Professor Michael J. Mazzone, Adjunct Professor of Law, University of Houston Law Center. The book is about the Supreme Court's recent decision in the St. Patrick's Day Parade case-- the Supreme Court's overruled a Massachusetts Supreme Court decision, saying that parade organizers had to allow gays to participate in their parade.

\$ Girl Friday sought for part time work from home, with possible office management later. Heavy phone usage. Detail oriented. Call 686-9298 for more details.

\$ On April 17 Dr. Leonard Peikoff appeared on the cable program "Politically Incorrect". A video tape of Dr. Peikoff's appearance is now in the HOS Library. The tape was contributed by Keith Robertson.