

Houston Objectivism Society Newsletter

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September 1996

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An Interview with Sean Rainer

Interviewed by J. Brian Phillips

*Editor's Note: Sean Rainer is
President of Students of Objectivism
at the University of Houston.*

*What are you studying in school?
What are your post-graduate plans?*

I am studying public relations and
minoring in theatre. I'm not quite
sure what I'm going to do with that.

Why did you choose UH?

I originally started at UH because
of a scholarship I received from the
Houston Chronicle. I attended a
summer workshop at the *Chronicle*
and at the end of it I was awarded
"Most Outstanding Student" and
given a four year scholarship. Part of
the deal was with UH and meant that
I pretty much had to major in
journalism. However, after working
on the campus paper and taking a
reporting job with the *Chronicle*
"This Week" section, I quickly found
that being a reporter was not for me.

*What was it about journalism that
turned you off?*

I don't know if it was journalism
per se that turned me off as much as
reporting. I got to where I couldn't
stand reporting. I would wake up and
just cringe at the thought of having to
go get a quote from some school
representative or something,
knowing full well what he was going
to say and that it would be a bunch of

bunk. It was very frustrating.

Also, I was increasingly frustrated
by having to remain "objective." Of
course, when I say "objective" here
I'm using in the way my editors used
it. Their idea of objective is neutral or,
worse, balanced. Being objective to a
reporter should mean reporting the
facts as they are to the best of your
knowledge, not making sure that you
say the same amount of bad stuff
about candidate A as you do candidate
B.

Unfortunately, I am not especially
good at any of the other areas of
journalism like copy editing. That
means I have limited options in that
field.

*Any thoughts about a career in
acting?*

That is still a possibility. I had
thought that I had decided for sure to
go to graduate school in theatre but
I'm not sure now. A few of my
professors gave me a big head with
some of their comments. I do love
acting though. It's one of my greatest
passions. I'll probably always be
thinking about acting, no matter what
I do.

Besides, I'm not sure it is practical
to launch an acting career from
Houston, Texas. But I like it here.

*How were you introduced to Ayn
Rand? What was your initial*

JUDGING THE CANDIDATES

The October 18 HOS meeting will be a presentation and discussion about that great spectacle that occurs every four years, where Americans rally around their favorite competitors in a emotional pageant of triumph and tragedy. This pageant is not the Olympics, but rather the Presidential elections.

In the twentieth century there has been more tragedy than triumph, and Objectivists are once again faced with choosing from two pragmatists and the little general from Plano, or not voting at all. With all of the sound bites, misleading advertisements, biased media coverage and the pragmatism that underlies it all, it becomes difficult to determine what principles, if any, a candidate holds or what values could be achieved from voting for him. We will look at what Clinton, Dole, Gore and Kemp are saying, evaluate them, and discuss their merits as potential leadership of the United States.

The meeting will be held on October 19 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.

reaction?

Besides the copy of *Atlas Shrugged* that my mother gave me when I was 13, I started actually studying Ayn Rand my senior year in high school at Deer Park. It was HOS member Jerry Smith that prodded me to look into Objectivism.

I'd say it took me all of about one essay to decide that I was going to be reading everything I could on Objectivism. After I had read a number of her essays and then *Atlas Shrugged*, I commented that I felt like a light had come on in my head. I literally saw everything I read in those first few months as common sense: not in the sense that Ayn Rand wasn't saying anything profound, just that she had said it so convincingly that my only response was, "Well, of course, who could argue with that?"

Eventually, I reached sort of a scary point where I found myself agreeing with everything, point for point. I'm not saying that's not possible, but for a young kid just being introduced to the world of philosophy, it does cast doubts. I would say, in all seriousness, that HOS is the main reason I was able to work through those concerns in a healthy way.

How, specifically, did HOS help you?

HOS has helped my study of Objectivism in so many ways. For starters, the meetings and the lending library have been invaluable. I mean, if I had a

question about some issue, I didn't have to rely just on what sources I had, I could go get a two hour lecture on the subject. That library is a tremendous resource.

Also, there was the knowledge and guidance of the HOS members. If ever I had a question, I could always go to an HOS member for help. I remember when I was taking Introduction to Philosophy at school and the professor was confusing the hell out of me, I would call Dwyane Hicks or talk to you or Warren at a meeting. Someone was always willing to talk until they were sure I understood, even to the point of continuing the conversation over a meal or something.

But most importantly to me was just the knowledge that people like the characters I had read about in Ayn Rand's novels actually existed. I would almost like to say that I was taught more by example than discussion. Simply observing the methodology of men like Warren Ross, Dwyane and yourself, and then to see women like Jeri Egan and Janet Wich, that was where I got my motivation.

What motivated your mother to give you Atlas at the age of 13?

At the time she said I would probably have to read it later on in high school anyway so I had better get started. I'm not sure what gave her the impression that it would be a fixture in English classes.

Later, after I discovered Objectivism in earnest, I asked my mom about it.

She said that it was one of her favorites and that it changed her life. However, she didn't pursue it further. She does support my involvement in HOS, though, and we have discussed Objectivism a little bit.

Right now, my sister is a senior in High School and I'm trying to get her to enter the Fountainhead essay contest.

How has Objectivism influenced your college career?

I can't image how utterly and completely confused I would be without Objectivism. Beyond many of the mindless bromides and platitudes that I hear from most of my professors, I have heard some down right evil things said. One of my philosophy professors even attacked Ayn Rand in class and said her writing was incomprehensible. Can you imagine that? Ayn Rand incomprehensible?

What activities does the campus club have scheduled for this year?

We would like to bring in a speaker again but that may not happen until the spring. Until then we will have regular meetings and continue to flyer the school with Ayn Rand's name.

How do students respond to the club's activities?

To be honest, I am a little put off by their reactions. At one point when I first started the

club, I was enthusiastic and willing to go out of my way to do things for the club. Eventually, I had to face that all of my efforts were reaping very little rewards. The people who had never heard of Objectivism never came back and the people who had were usually not interested in discussing Ayn Rand as much as their variation on her. I don't necessarily blame anyone, but it is terribly frustrating.

You recently helped start a rock and roll band. Could you tell us a little about it?

I would love to. The band is the passion of my life right now. It's more important to me than anything else. I feel like I have found an outlet where I can truly throw my entire soul into it.

We're called Two Second Stare (think flirting). I play guitar and sing. I write almost all of the lyrics and much of the music. We are an alternative band with a pop, kind of catchy, feel.

So far, we have been met with an overwhelmingly positive response. It's better than we ever hoped for, really.

How has Objectivism influenced your musical choices?

The only way I can think to answer the question is by comparing it to how I wrote before Objectivism. I would say that I am more methodical now, concentrating on meaning and structure and making sure to

only use words I can define. It might sound funny, but I would actually put words in songs just because I thought they sounded cool.

Besides that I would say that I try to stay far away from dark themes nowadays. Dark lyrics used to come real easy to me but I just don't have much interest in them anymore.

I would say my philosophy is only obvious to someone who knows me. We have a song called "One Big I," for example, that is about individualism.

All of my songs, properly understood, are consistent with Objectivism. What you have to understand is that many of them are written from another persona. One called "Don't Mind Me" says "Don't mind me I'm living a lie." Of course I'm not living a lie, but the character singing the song is.

Popular music seems to have many influences today-- rock, country, rap. Any comments?

Music is a very personal thing. You and I may disagree on what values, if any, can be gained from a certain piece, and that doesn't necessarily mean we differ philosophically. I think the important question to ask is "What do you value?" If you value something rational about the piece, and you're not being subjective about it, then there is room for differing tastes. There are limits, of course, but being that we don't have an objective vocabulary for music, those

Anthem Essay Contest Winner

by Sam White

In *Anthem*, Ayn Rand portrayed the world to come not as a great technological Utopia, but as a backwards, primitive place of ignorance and superstition. Unlike the other writers of her day, she possessed the insight and intelligence to see that a collective and totalitarian future would lead not to the splendors of a great society, but to the menial, tribal life of ancient times. Rand realized that in a world where independent thoughts were prohibited and individual accomplishment impossible, and where reason was supplanted by ignorance and faith, technology was impossible. Progress is the result of a world of the thought, action, and reason of individuals and cannot exist on any other terms. Moreover, collectivism is a creed of death and technology a state of life, and ultimately, the two can't coexist.

Because technological advancements are products of and for the individual, they are the first thing to be abandoned by the collectivist state. In *Anthem*, the machinery and knowledge of the "Unmentionable Times" of the free world were destroyed and the individual was forbidden to make advancements of his own. Instead, the "Home of the Scholars" was established whose only accomplishments in centuries were the reinvention of candles and glass. Having sacrificed individual thought and initiative to the collective, all creative thought became impossible. "Collective

thought" is a contradiction in terms; all thought is done by the individual. Therefore, no amount of "collective thinking" will produce a thing. Moreover, if all ideas are only accepted as true when thought of by all men, as in *Anthem*, no new ideas can ever be accepted. As all new inventions come from the individual, he must be alone in his knowledge until others accept his ideas. In the end, an inventor must become a martyr in the collectivist world. His ideas are not to be accepted, and he is punished for having an independent mind. It is doubtful that even a candle could be produced in such a society. In *Anthem*, progress came only when the protagonist, Equality 7-2521, rejected society's view of morality, and pursued, as an individual, his discovery of electricity for its own sake.

Just as individual thought is sacrificed to the thinking of the majority in the collectivist state, so logic and reason are sacrificed to faith and superstition. Because collectivist ideas cannot exist save by ignorance, a totalitarian collectivist state cannot exist without suppressing the truth and reason, man's means of obtaining it. In the Middle ages, the Church refused to allow people knowledge that Earth was not the center of the universe, and Soviet Russia taught Lamark's pseudoscientific theory of evolution. In fact, all totalitarian states have forced lies and superstition on their people,

the world of Equality 7-2521 being no exception. He described being taught that the Earth was flat and how men could be bled to cure all ailments. Additionally, the word "I" had been prohibited, as if, by erasing the word, they could eliminate the existence of the individual. However, progress cannot be built out of faith and superstition any more than a skyscraper can be built out of thin air. Invention is not and cannot be a process of random actions or arbitrary whims. It relies solely on identity and causality, the concepts of reason. Men cannot create anything new while either denying that it can exist or while claiming that their actions have no consequences. Nor can new inventions be created without facts any more than a building can be built without a foundation. Therefore, when knowledge and learning are prohibited, and the truth is denied, progress becomes impossible. Moreover, faith and superstition give way to fear and denial of technology. When men are reduced to the intellectual level of savages, they will react, like savages, with dread and hatred to any new idea that goes against their mystic creed. In *Anthem*, the council of scholars cringed at the sight of electricity and responded to its inventor with anger and malice.

Finally, when a society embraces collectivism it rejects life, and with it production and progress. Collectivism rejects the

Second Renaissance Summer Conference

by Neil Erian

individual, and in doing so, it rejects the individual's right to live. But if the individual cannot live, then no life is possible, for it is only the individual who lives at all. There cannot be any "collective life". Life is a process of thought and action, and no "collective thoughts" or "collective actions" can exist. A collectivist world which seeks to destroy the individual seeks to destroy life. However, when life is banished, production and progress must be banished as well, for they are man's means of living. Therefore, in the collectivist world, technology, the state of production and progress, will be forced back to the days of savages. In the world of *Anthem*, the technology of the free world was not simply lost, but deliberately destroyed, by the people of the collectivist state. Their hatred of the individual meant a hatred of technology. It is the glory and achievement of the individual which collectivism seeks to destroy, and it is this same glory and achievement which are technology.

Sam White is a Junior at Bellaire High School.

The 1996 Second Renaissance conference in Washington D.C. will be memorable experience for years to come. The fourth of July celebration stood at its pinnacle, beginning with Dr. Ridpath's, "The Vision and the Genesis of the Declaration of Independence." In this moving talk Dr. John Ridpath demonstrated the unity of philosophy and history in the Founding Fathers' thought, and afterwards he received a standing ovation. On the morning of Independence Day we all stood together in the main conference ballroom and sang "The Star-Spangled Banner." Dr. Leonard Peikoff then rose to the podium and read John Adams' essay, "A Nation was Born in a Day." The morning ceremony culminated with students reading the "Declaration of Independence" followed by singing of "America the Beautiful," "God Bless America," and "My Country 'Tis of Thee." Finally that evening, after a day of sight-seeing, we relaxed on the steps of the Jefferson Memorial and, from across the Potomac, watched a breathtaking fireworks display. It was the best July fourth celebration of my life.

For a brief time, rational individuals came together in pursuit of common values within a city of mixed values, of an 'ought' within the 'is.' Objectivists from around the world came to enjoy a benevolent atmosphere, to meet others with common interests and unique qualities, and above all to seek intellectual understanding. The primary intellectual fields that sustain human life--art, economics, and philosophy--were well represented at the conference, and provided attendees with an education far superior to a modern college curriculum. There

were many excellent courses given by both professors and graduate students. Unfortunately, due to time and space limitations, only a few of the most notable lectures are reviewed below.

In "The Art of the Ancient World," Mary Ann Sures surveyed sculpture of the ancients, from the Egyptians to the Greeks to the Romans to the early Christians. The esthetic and philosophic contrast between the pharaohs and Greek rulers was especially vivid. In Egyptian sculpture the pharaoh's anatomy is indistinct; limbs are thick and pudgy. The pharaohs stand in restrained, inactive frontal poses, fists at their sides, with a passive, empty gaze. The Greeks, on the other hand, were very concerned with human anatomy and proper body proportions. They valued action poses, and a serenely purposeful face. Egyptian and Greek sculpture demonstrate opposite perspectives--on reality, the mysterious and unpredictable versus the self-evident and intelligible; on man, passivity and impotence versus activity and efficaciousness.

In his lecture "Economic Growth: How to Foster It/How to Destroy It" Dr. Northrup Buechner demonstrated that growth depends primarily upon increasing the total productive capacity of the economy. In this context the fundamental question for a man or nation is how much productive capacity should go to adding new and better productive capacity; and how much should go to present consumption? Dr. Buechner showed that an individual or country that uses more capacity to add

capacity will have a higher standard of living over the long run, and will achieve it faster. Unfortunately, our nation's rulers are achieving the exact opposite goal by diverting more productive capacity toward the production of consumer goods. This policy has been dramatically expanded over the last 100 years. Under the guise of fostering economic growth "phantom goods" are gradually displacing valid goods. A phantom good is "a good which makes no objective contribution to human life, but is required by law." Such "goods" include tax companies (e.g., H&R Block), pollution controls, and phantom labor (e.g., paper pushers needed to comply with regulations). Some indirect ways of producing phantom goods are the personal income tax, which reduces savings, and social security and welfare, which reduce the amount that individuals want to save. Dr. Buechner concluded that only an economic policy based on a rational philosophy save us from this onslaught of anti-saving.

Shifting into philosophy, Dr. Gary Hull explained in "Metaphysical Value Judgments" that the term 'important' is key to understanding why individuals choose certain ends over others. A metaphysical value judgment (MVJ) is a conclusion containing an abstract appraisal of a basic fact. From everyday concretes Dr. Hull identified the locus of MVJs in a man's personal life, in a culture, and in fiction. For a rabble-rouser the MVJ is "It's important to have discord and strife in life."

For today's news media, "It's important to pay attention to disasters and losers." For Dagny, "We never had to take any of it

seriously, did we?" For something to be important it must have "a quality, character, or standing entitling it to attention or consideration." The "important" can concern reality, man, or man's relationship to reality.

By bridging metaphysics and human action, the important determines what a man thinks is possible in ethics. The criteria of "important" is not that which is good; "important" and "good" are not the same. The criteria of "important" is cognitive, not normative. Thus, the rabble-rouser, explicitly or implicitly, holds that "the universe is contradictory, unintelligible." With this criterion applied to human relationships he believes in the potency of strife and discord among men. And thus, he acts for ends destructive to the value of peaceful coexistence. On the other hand, Dagny holds that the universe is non contradictory, intelligible. With this criterion applied to her own basic relationship to the world, Dagny believes in the potency of achieving rational values and in the metaphysical insignificance of the irrational. Thus, she acts for ends which sustain human life.

In his course "Ayn Rand versus Modern Philosophy" Dr. Bernstein identified Objectivism's essential differences with modern philosophy. The two themes dominating modern philosophy are 1) subjectivism in epistemology--knowledge of reality comes from looking inward, without reference to external facts; and 2) the primacy of consciousness in metaphysics--consciousness in some form is more fundamental than existence; existence depends on its functioning. Dr. Bernstein

demonstrated the historical development from the personal to the social versions of these themes. He identified basic errors that early modern philosophers, such as Descartes and Berkeley, committed in their attempts to define the proper relationship of subject to object and of knowledge to reality. These errors gradually led philosophers to become skeptical of whether there even is a subject and if it can know anything at all. Ultimately, Kant's Copernican Revolution dispensed with this issue altogether, and held that the individual is helpless; he cannot know reality or his own consciousness. All he can do is conform to the consciousness of the group. This development to a social version of the primacy of consciousness has had devastating consequences in the later theories of Hegel, Marx, and contemporary philosophers, all of whom hold that there is no object, only consciousness.

But Ayn Rand's identification of the proper relationship of consciousness to existence-- that existence comes first and consciousness depends on it--breaks the Kantian stranglehold on man's mind. Ayn Rand's philosophy accepts the primacy of existence.

Of all the conference lectures, the highlight was Dr. Peikoff's "Unity in Epistemology and Ethics." In this course, Dr. Peikoff's purpose was to curb the rationalism he encountered in the thinking of some objectivists. Dr. Peikoff began with the ancient Greeks and their attempts to identify the proper relationship of concepts to particulars, of the one to the many. The failure of Western philosophers to resolve this issue

has, to this day, preserved a dichotomy between the one and the many across many fields of knowledge. Objectivism rejects this dichotomy. Those Objectivists influenced by rationalism agree that "all is one," but reject the one (concepts) as transcending the many (reality).

Thus, such Objectivists also agree with empiricists that the many are real. The key to the Objectivist view is that consciousness depends on existence and, thus, on the application of an objective epistemological method to the many. On the other hand, rationalists and empiricists both hold that existence depends on the functioning of consciousness, and regard revelation or feeling as the means by which to grasp the one in the many. In the objectivist view, however, we can compress the many into the one only by grasping their identity.

Using the item of knowledge, "The plane from L.A. will be two hours late." Dr. Peikoff concretized this point—that all knowledge of reality is interconnected, that it is one. Thus, to grasp any item of knowledge fully is to grasp the whole. In order to grasp that the plane will be two hours late, personal knowledge of planes, weather, time measurement, etc. is inadequate. It is not primarily your personal context, rather it is the context of mankind's knowledge as accumulated through centuries that helps you grasp the item fully. Further, the attempt to grasp an item of knowledge by deduction is incorrect. "Reason is man's means of survival" is not true because "Values require life, life requires action, action requires knowledge, knowledge comes from reason,

therefore reason is man's means of survival." Knowledge that reason is man's means of survival must be a condensation of observations from many era's throughout history. The Industrial Revolution, for example, was essential to Ayn Rand's formation of the objectivist ethics because it showed at a perceptible level the connection between abstract thinking and practical action, between knowledge and life. During his talk Dr. Peikoff said that one day he wanted to give a course on reaching Objectivism inductively. Such a course would start from scratch; it would not reference Ayn Rand, her works, or any other objectivist material.

Dr. Peikoff also offered a new and fascinating identification of knowledge as a unity in normative concepts, applying it to the concept 'value.' 'Value' requires two definitions in order to make the development and unity of knowledge possible. The first definition is more general, and demarcates a pattern of behavior directly observable in reality. The second definition is a derivative—an inference from the first, which is its necessary precondition. The fundamental which differentiates the second from the first is "a certain use of free-will." The first definition, "that which one acts to gain and/or keep," represents the only direct tie to observation. If you throw it out as early or temporary you lose information about all men and other organisms and risk a rationalistic application of the concept 'value.' The second definition, "that which one acts to gain and/or keep, which furthers life," permits integration of the same data with an objective standard. The two definitions are

essential and must share the same term 'value' because both refer to the same facts. A fully consistent implementation of the first sense of 'value' is the implementation of the second sense. In other words, the second sense of 'value' is simply the first volitionally applied without contradiction.

Thus, does James Taggart pursue any values? Yes, in general, though not in any rational sense. Powerlust stems from the choice to abandon reality, and the attempt to live in defiance of facts. Does Christianity really offer a code of morality? Yes, but it is not rational. Is Jesus a hero? Yes, he is the embodiment of values, though not of rational values? Dr. Peikoff demonstrated that Ayn Rand's general definitions of normative concepts such as 'value', 'morality', 'hero', 'self-esteem,' etc. indicate and address a need shared by all human beings. Further, it is Ayn Rand's philosophy, unlike others, that remains true to this basic need. This is what makes Objectivism an intellectually honest philosophy; it recognizes and stays true to the hierarchical nature of knowledge and to the locus of human free-will.

The recognition of what might be and 'ought' to be as the harmonious application of human volition to that which 'is,' is what fundamentally identifies the Second Renaissance Conference as an intellectual gathering. This is what makes possible rational discourse on art, economics, ethics, and philosophy; great achievements of giants like the Founding Fathers; amazing talents and success of individuals I met at the conference; benevolence among rational individuals.

It would be inaccurate to say

that human ability and benevolence can only be found within Objectivism. After all, the United States is the most technologically advanced, the strongest, and still the most benevolent country in the world. In "Heroism in Modern American Literature" Dr. Bernstein identified this fact, but demonstrated that the tragic quality of many American literary heroes is their lack of philosophical and moral understanding and their inability to grasp the nature of evil.

American literary heroes like Shane, or Phineas in *A Separate Peace*, or McMurphy in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* have great physical prowess and spiritual grandeur, but suffer from a severe mind/body split. Their heroic acts transfigure the lives of others, but not their own. The parallel to twentieth century America is exact. America is a deeply benevolent country with tremendous "power and will to do good." But lacking intellectual understanding and moral certainty, its spirit and strength are being slowly bled. The triumph of the Second Renaissance Conference and of any future renaissance lies with a new type of hero, the man of great prowess in the material realm who actively seeks intellectual understanding--the man of free-will.

All in all, the Second Renaissance Conference is an excellent intellectual and emotional respite for anyone who values his own life and this earth.

Interview

(continued)

limits are pretty broad.

As an example, I really like clever lyrics. Within limits, I really don't mind what the message is if it is conveyed in a unique or thought provoking way. Many of my musician friends never listen or even care about lyrics so long as they match the music. And others don't care for lyrics at all. I personally can't get into that too much but I make no moral evaluation of them because they do.

Actually, there are a couple of bands that I won't listen to because of philosophical reasons. For the most part, though, I would say that my philosophy only helps me to enjoy a song more when it does have uplifting lyrics.

As long as we're talking musical tastes, I should point out that probably my favorite artist is Buddy Holly. That's more of what I try to emulate in my songs, that kind of feeling.

I understand you are an avid golfer. I find the sport rather frustrating at times. What do you think?

Yes, of course it is very frustrating. But that's what makes it such a great sport: it seems, at once, impossibly complex and brilliantly simplistic. Unlike, football, tennis or any other more physical sport, the physical requirements for golf allow almost anyone to play golf; however, the mental requirements for the game allow

almost no one to play consistently well.

I've noticed that one of the biggest points of frustration comes from expecting too much. I mean, I went for a long time without hitting a ball yet I still got upset with myself when I miss hit a few. Now I try to remind myself to keep the full context in mind when evaluating my performance.

Golf is very spiritual, I can't wait to play again.

Spiritual in what sense?

Well, you have a great deal of time to reflect on a golf course. Often there is several minutes between shots for contemplation. Also, there is something very symbolic about golf in that it is basically you against the course, or man against nature. It is about saying, "No matter how many obstacles they put in my way--water, sand, whatever-- I'm going to make it through unharmed."

That's probably a little melodramatic, but then us golfers tend to get that way.

HOS Meeting Summaries

“Ideological Vegetarianism and Animal ‘Rights’” August 10, 1996

The August HOS meeting featured a presentation by Steve Miller titled “Ideological Vegetarianism and Animal ‘Rights’”.

Steve began by drawing a distinction between two types of vegetarianism-- that founded on preference or health, and that founded on an explicit philosophical ideology. It was this latter form of vegetarianism that Steve addressed.

He noted that medical science is dominated by a rational epistemology. However, bad epistemology, particularly within the press, is leading to the use of medicine’s prestige to support such destructive movements as environmentalism and animal “rights”.

Steve stressed the role epistemology plays in the development of such movements. The non-objectivity of the news media has led to the use of valid medical advice (increasing vegetable and fruit consumption) as scientific evidence in support of the animal rights movement.

Steve then turned his attention to the most influential animal rights advocate, Peter Singer. Singer is a professor of philosophy and Director for the Centre for Human Bioethics at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia and he is the author of *Animal Liberation*, widely

regarded as the start of the animal rights movement.

Singer’s argument that eating animals is immoral has a long history, dating back to the Pythagoreans. More recently, Jeremy Bentham argued that reason was an insufficient basis for establishing rights. Instead, the ability to suffer pain is what establishes one’s rights (namely, the “right” not to experience arbitrary pain).

Singer cites Bentham’s arguments numerous times in *Animal Liberation*. Singer also equates the earlier struggles of women and blacks with the animal rights movement. These human beings were once denied their rights, and it is now time to liberate animals.

Singer’s argument rests largely on setting up straw men-- misrepresenting his opponents for easy counter-arguments. For example, he argues that grain fed to animals would feed more people than the resulting meat. While this is true, it has nothing to do with establishing rights. The farm industry accepts the altruism underlying Singer’s argument, claiming that it exists to feed the world, rather than refuting the claim that animals have rights.

In addition to seeking an abolition on eating meat, Singer calls for the total abolition of animal research. Again, Singer misrepresents arguments in support of medical research, and then “refutes” them.

Steve documented numerous

other tactics employed by Singer-- context dropping, lying, and ad hominem arguments. Unleashed on a philosophically unastute public, Singer’s emotional pleas have found a receptive audience.

Quoting from Ayn Rand’s essay, “The Anatomy of Compromise,” Steve noted the “success” Singer has experienced. He allies himself with any sympathizer he can find, knowing that it brings him one step closer to his goals. In response, his intellectually unarmed opponents have conceded the moral premises involved.

Steve concluded that until altruism is rejected, movements like animal rights will continue to move our culture closer to destruction.

The transcript of Steve’s presentation is available through the HOS Web Site. The URL is <http://members.aol.com/wsross/vegan.html>.

“Objectivism as a Guide to Self-Change” September 7, 1996

The September HOS meeting was held in conjunction with a course sponsored by Lyceum International featuring Dr. Ellen Kenner, a clinical psychologist practicing in Rhode Island. The course was titled “Objectivism as a Guide to Self-Change”.

Dr. Kenner began by noting that most individuals are “fence

sitters"-- filled with mixed premises and half-formed ideas-- when they discover Ayn Rand. The goal of the course was to identify the skills necessary to uproot these false ideas and consistently apply Objectivism. She noted that there are no shortcuts to psychological health - it requires the same objectivity and effort as physical health.

The two primary causes of psychological problems are mixed premises and sloppy thinking. Both undermine psychological health by reducing one's confidence in the competence of one's mind.

Dr. Kenner noted that psychological health requires that one know the enemy-- which she concretized as "Dr. Toohey"-- well. It is imperative to know the premises which undermine psychological health. Dr. Toohey, she noted, has reversed good and evil. For example, Toohey

regards such characteristics as conformity, faith, and humility as virtues, while calling independence, rationality, and pride sinful. The degree to which one accepts Toohey's ideas is the degree to which one accepts unearned guilt, and thus undermines one's psychological health.

Dr. Kenner stressed that psychological problems should not be judged morally. Instead, they should be regarded as a problem which must be corrected. One should approach such problems, she said, as a scientist or detective.

There are five stages in the process of change-- non-thinking, thinking, action plan, action, and "slip ups".

The non-thinking stage is that time before one is aware of a problem, or when a problem is willfully evaded. When one becomes cognizant of a problem,

one enters the thinking stage. One's thinking is then translated into an action plan prior to acting. Dr. Kenner noted that "slip ups" are inevitable in the change process, and one should not berate oneself when they occur. Instead, one should return to the thinking stage.

Dr. Kenner concluded by describing numerous self-help skills in the areas of thinking, valuing, and automatizing.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

\$ Michael Mazzone recently won a court ruling in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit regarding IOLTA accounts. ("IOLTA" means interest on lawyers' trust accounts.) We'll have more on this victory in the next issue of this newsletter.

\$ The Committee for Property Rights now has a Web Site. The URL is <http://members.aol.com/HughAxton/CPR.html>

\$ Lyceum International will present a course titled "In Defense of Financial Markets" by Yaron Brook on November 23 at the Wyndham Greenspoint Hotel. Dr. Brook is an assistant professor of finance at Santa Clara University and vice president and co-founder of Lyceum International. Lyceum International can be contacted at (360) 479-4765 (phone); (360) 479-4766 (FAX); plbenson@ix.netcom.com (e-mail)