

# Liberty Learning Exchange

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Notes compiled by John Teschky, January 2002, from Nathaniel Branden's 1958 lecture series, *The Basic Principles of Objectivism*. These notes are not approved by any organization, and only represent John Teschky's interpretation of the lecture.

## The Role of Philosophy, Part 1

### Objectivism

#### *Long Definition:*

- A) Existence, reality, the external world is what it is independent of human consciousness. Independent of anyone's knowledge, judgment, hopes, fears. Facts are facts. A=A. Things are what they are.
- B) Reason, the faculty that perceives, identifies and integrates the material provided by the senses, is fully competent to know the facts of reality.
- C) Human perception of the facts of reality must constitute the basis of value judgments. Reason is the only guide to judgment and actions.
- D) Man is an end in himself, not a means to the ends of others. He must live for his own sake, with the achievement of his rational self-interest as the moral purpose of his life, neither sacrificing himself to others, nor sacrificing others to himself.
- E) No one has the right to seek values from others by the initiation of physical force.
- F) The politico-economic expression of these principles is laissez-faire capitalism.
- G) The absence of these principles from men's minds and actions is the reason for the current state of the world.

#### *Short definition:*

Man must live exclusively by the guidance of reason.

Ambitiousness, integrity, independence, self-esteem are derivatives and consequences of rationality.

One does not know a philosophy if one knows merely its conclusions without knowing the proofs that validate them. Otherwise is to embrace dogma.

### The Purpose of Philosophy:

The purpose of philosophy is to provide man with an integrated view of existence, of his own nature, and of his relationship to the world in which he lives. Philosophy is the science that deals with man's relationship to existence.

### The Five Basic Branches of Philosophy:

- 1) Epistemology
- 2) Politics
- 3) Aesthetics
- 4) Ethics
- 5) Metaphysics

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*Metaphysics* deals with the fundamental nature of existence. It defines those principles that are true of everything that exists. Pertains to existence, reality, and the nature of things. Metaphysics, one's view of the nature of reality, is the basis for every thought, feeling and action of man.

*Epistemology* deals with the nature and means of human knowledge.

*Ethics* is concerned with discovering and defining a code of values to define man's actions and choices. Determines the purpose and course of man's life.

*Politics* deals with the purposes, principles, and organization of social systems.

*Aesthetics* deals with the nature of art and its value to man. Art expresses values.

Need metaphysics and epistemology to derive ethics.

Need ethics to derive politics.

Aesthetics is derived from metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics.

### **Metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics encompass these three questions:**

- 1) *What exists?*
- 2) *How do you know?*
- 3) *So what?*

One has no choice as to whether he holds a philosophy of life. Everyone does. The only choices are whether they know it or not, or whether it is true or false.

Most people get their philosophical beliefs from the culture in which they live. They accept the ideas not by thinking, but by osmosis. They do not question whether they are true or false.

Without a conscious, rational, true philosophical belief put into action, happiness is impossible.

### **The Role of Reason in the Development of Western Civilization**

All philosophical systems fall into one of two categories:

- 1) Those that hold, in metaphysics, that reality is a stable, objective absolute, and (in epistemology), that man's mind can know it. (Aristotle/Reason)
- 2) Those that hold, in metaphysics, that reality as perceived by man is an indeterminate, unknowable illusion, and (in epistemology), that man's mind is impotent. (Plato/Mysticism)

There have only been three periods when a philosophy of reason was the dominant school of thought in the culture: Ancient Greece, the Renaissance, and the Nineteenth Century.

Philosophy was born in Greece in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC by Thales, the Father of Western Philosophy. Thales implied that man's mind was competent, through reason, to know the universe. Up to that time, questions of the nature of the universe and man's place in it were dominated by religion (faith—acceptance without reason or proof).

Plato was the first to build a complete philosophical system (whose record has been preserved), but it was based upon mysticism.

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114 Aristotle was the first philosopher to declare that reality is real and that man's consciousness is  
115 conscious. There is only one reality—the one that man perceives. Man's consciousness is valid,  
116 and that reason is the tool that man uses to know reality. The task of reason is the perception of  
117 reality. The father of the science of logic, founder of the law of identity ( $A=A$ ).  
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119 Every attack on reason from any quarter, every attempt to undercut or subvert man's mind, starts  
120 with or ends with an escape from the law of identity.  
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122 Thinking is not an activity we learn by instinct. Aristotle taught us how to think (proper nature,  
123 rules, methods of intellectual activity—control over the power of the mind.)  
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125 Roman culture was an extension of Greek culture, but with no fundamental improvements. The  
126 collapse of Rome brought the Dark Ages, or Middle Ages. The instruments of torture of that  
127 period (like the Rack and the Iron Maiden)—the LEGAL INSTRUMENTS, LEGALLY EMPLOYED  
128 BY THE COURTS OF JUSTICE—mark the one period of Western Civilization ruled totally by  
129 mysticism. Religion ruled every aspect of human life. Philosophy was the handmaiden of  
130 religion. The neo-Platonists served the church. The works of Aristotle were all but lost to  
131 Western Civilization. Augustine (the chief philosopher of the time), called the quest for  
132 knowledge the "lust of the eyes," connoting that the quest for knowledge is a sin. Eight hundred  
133 years of no real advancement or individual liberty.  
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135 In the Thirteenth Century, Western Civilization re-discovered Aristotle during the Crusades  
136 through the 25% of his work that had been saved by the Arabs after the burning of the library at  
137 Alexandria.  
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139 Albertus Magnus wrote great treatise on and about Aristotle. His student, Thomas Aquinas  
140 attempted the first great comprehensive system of philosophy since Ancient Greece, and he  
141 created it on an Aristotelian basis. He ended the Dark Ages. He attempted a synthesis of  
142 religion and philosophy. Aristotle's thinking was the great bomb that ended the reign of faith and  
143 brought The Renaissance.  
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145 No movement in history has ever succeeded without a philosophical base. There were many  
146 mass uprisings during the Dark Ages, that collapsed without a system of ideas to give them  
147 coherence and purpose, ending in bloody defeats. One cannot fight the irrational with the  
148 irrational. Aristotle, through Aquinas, provided this system of ideas that brought about The  
149 Renaissance. A little reason goes a long way.  
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151 In the late Fourteenth Century saw the fruits of Aquinas/Aristotle. Every age is the actualization  
152 of the thinking of the proceeding period.