

Liberty Learning Exchange

9 January 2003

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 2

The Renaissance: great human achievement, great genius in all branches of endeavor.

Political: broke the feudal system—comparative freedom (if only by virtue of chaos)

Religion: broke monopoly of Catholic church

Culture: broke from mysticism

Slogan of Renaissance: "The right to seek"

The history of philosophy since Renaissance is retreat from reason. But, the influence of science on society has grown of science. But, mystics began attacking reason in name of reason.

Many scientists considered themselves anti-Aristotelian, since Aristotle was co-opted by the church.

Aristotelian: led to Enlightenment, industrial revolution

Platonism: lead to Kant, Hegel, Marxism

17th+18th century philosophers attempted to construct rational political philosophy, beginning with Locke.

Reason & freedom are correlated. Mysticism requires force/fear to be accepted.

Union of faith and force resulted in many religious wars, and feudal system.

Industrial revolution swept away the rule of faith and force. Rational mind took control of material existence.

Resulted in wealth, freedom, and standard of living unequalled by the total of all societies prior to industrial revolution.

19th Century

- Greatest period of freedom, longest period without a world war (1815-1914). Slavery and serfdom were abolished in all of civilized world.
- Reason controlled material existence, but mysticism was regaining control of academic mind.
- Aristotelean in action, Platonist in thinking.

Kant

- Major figure in 19th century Platonist revival.
- 2 realities: phenomenal and nominal.
- Reason cannot know reality as it really is, cannot know things in themselves. Knowledge gained through mind produced through mind's own structure, not by an objective reality. To perceive is to distort. The world knowable through reason is not real.
- All of today's leading schools of philosophical thought are derived from Kant.
- Plato-Kant-Hegel: blueprint for totalitarian state.

Ideas take time to penetrate culture. 19th century enjoyed dividends from philosophy of 18th century. 20th century. Suffered from philosophy of 19th century.

The status of reason in the dominant philosophy of an era predicts the political climate of next era.

Current philosophy dominated by anti-reason, lack of faith in reason, exploration of "mysticism"

(Branden goes on to give many examples of this, via quotes from leading 20th century philosophers)

Our culture is bankrupt. Mysticism and its creed of self-sacrifice have created a moral vacuum.

There is no historical determinism: philosophy brought us to this state, philosophy can bring us out.

When one fights for the supremacy of reason, one fights for “Any achievement, any value, any grandeur, any joy that have ever existed on this earth.” --John Galt

The tragedy of western civilization is that while it rejected the theology of mysticism, it didn't reject it's ethics: self-sacrifice.

Objectivism offers a rational system of values, logically demonstrable

The Metaphysics of Objectivism:

Consider these two concepts: do you know what they mean?

1. Something: applies to the total of your knowledge. The fundamental concept of consciousness. To be conscious, is to be conscious of something. Existence. To know what a something is, represents the next steps of knowledge.
2. Nothing: Non-existence. Has meaning only in relation to something. Nothing by itself is nothing. Non-existence.

With the awareness of existence, knowledge and consciousness begin

The Law of Identity: That which is, is what it is. A thing is itself. A is A.

Is an axiom: an abstract statement of truth. Known immediately upon first perceptions.

The concepts of existence and identity cannot be divorced. To know anything is to know that which is, is what it is.

Existence is identity, consciousness is identification.

These concepts are contained in any idea a person claims to possess.

If nothing exists, then there can be no consciousness.

A consciousness aware of only itself is not consciousness.

Objectiveness:

- Reality is that which exists.
- That which exists, exists independent of consciousness.
- The purpose of consciousness is to perceive reality.
- To say something exists objectively is to say it exists outside of any consciousness.
- Reality is the object of our consciousness.
- To be is to be something.
- To be something is to be something specific.
- To be something is to have an identity.

Subjectiveness:

- This may be true for you, but not true for me.
- All of our differences are a matter of semantics.
- Such statements imply that there is no firm reality.

When people disagree on the same subject, and reality is real, then only one position is true

Objective reality is required for cooperation and communication among people. Without objective reality, might becomes right.

Achieve power over reality not by blindness, but by sight

The Primary Question of Metaphysics:

Do you recognize the fact that existence exists, that reality is an objective absolute and your mind can know it, or do you believe that existence, reality, consciousness, and mind are subjective illusions without identity in the non-brain of a non-man.