

# UNDERSTANDING OBJECTIVISM



A GUIDE TO LEARNING  
AYN RAND'S PHILOSOPHY

LECTURES BY

**LEONARD PEIKOFF**

EDITED BY

**MICHAEL S. BERLINER**



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# CONTENTS

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Preface

From Leonard Peikoff

LECTURE ONE: [The Role of Philosophy](#)

LECTURE TWO: [Life as the Standard of Value](#)

LECTURE THREE: [Honesty, Importance of Principles](#)

LECTURE FOUR: [Force and Rights](#)

LECTURE FIVE: [The Hierarchy of Objectivism](#)

LECTURE SIX: [Objectivism Versus the Intrinsic and Subjective](#)

LECTURE SEVEN: [Rationalism](#)

LECTURE EIGHT: [Rationalism and Empiricism](#)

LECTURE NINE: [Objectivism Versus Rationalism and Empiricism](#)

LECTURE TEN: [Emotions and Moral Judgment](#)

LECTURE ELEVEN: [Intellectual Honesty](#)

# PREFACE

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Philosophy, and particularly Objectivism, is supposed to be an aid in life; and if it's chewed and concretized, that's how it functions. And that's the main reason I wanted to give this course on understanding Objectivism. Objectivism should help you to enjoy life. It should help to make you glad that you're alive.

—Leonard Peikoff, from “Understanding Objectivism,” Lecture Eleven

On October 4, 1983, Leonard Peikoff presented the first lecture in his course “Understanding Objectivism.” Dr. Peikoff's lectures continued for another ten weeks, live at the Hotel Roosevelt in New York City. Beginning in early 1984, the course was offered on tape to audiences in more than a hundred cities throughout the United States and Canada and in numerous other countries. “Understanding Objectivism” is still in use today, with a number of the lectures included in the curriculum of the Ayn Rand Institute's Objectivist Academic Center.

This course—and this book—should *not* be considered an introduction to Objectivism. As Dr. Peikoff stresses in the opening lecture, it “presupposes familiarity with Ayn Rand's works.... [I]f you don't know anything about Objectivism, this is the wrong lecture to be at.”

The focus is on thinking methods: the right and wrong methods for trying to understand philosophy in general and for understanding and validating Objectivism in particular. But there is a “dividend,” as Dr. Peikoff put it, which is to “get clear on some specific idea that we are applying the method to.” The teaching of a method to understand Objectivism necessitates the “chewing” of its essential ideas (for example, objectivity and life as the standard of value), and thus considerable time is spent on the content of Objectivism and Objectivism as a philosophical system.

Because the course was offered orally and much of it extemporaneously, a significant amount of editing was required to make it more amenable to the reading audience, but I tried to retain the less formal tone of the original oral discourse. I hasten to add, however, that I did not edit for philosophical content. I eliminated repetition, colloquial and conversational expressions, and even some material that was time-sensitive—that is, relevant to the live audience but not to readers—and made some grammatical changes. I also eliminated (as repetitive or off topic) some questions and answers from the Q&A sessions following each lecture, and I moved some questions and answers to the lectures that contained those topics. All punctuation is mine, because I had access only to the tape recording, not to any original manuscripts. A word-for-word transcript of the tape recording of the course resides in the Ayn Rand Archives.

—Michael S. Berlin

# FROM LEONARD PEIKOFF

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People have often asked for a written version of my oral lecture courses, on the premise—with which I agree—that written lectures are much more accessible to the student. Writing, however, is in this context virtually a different language from speaking; a raw transcript of an extemporaneous speech, however excellent, is almost always filled with defects and confusions of one sort or another—and so is frequently boring as well. To turn a lecture course into an accurate, clear, and valuable book, a huge amount of time-consuming editing is required, a task that can be performed only by an individual with the necessary motivation, knowledge of the subject, and editorial skills. My own age and priorities make it impossible for me to undertake such a task.

I have therefore decided to authorize several individuals who possess the necessary qualifications to edit and bring out in book form certain of my courses, and to do so entirely without my participation. Although I have confidence in these editors to the extent that I know them, I have had no part in their work at any stage—no guiding discussions, no reading of transcripts, not even a glance at early drafts or final copy. Even a glance might reveal errors, and I could not then evade the need to read more, and so on, which is precisely what is out of the question.

In my opinion, the lecture course in this book is of real value to those interested in the subject. But when you read it, please bear two things in mind: Michael Berliner is an excellent, proven editor—and I have no idea of what he has done in this book.

P.S. If you happen to spot and wish to point out seeming errors in the text, please e-mail Dr. Berliner at the Ayn Rand Institute. If you like this book, I may add, do not give me too much of the credit. My course provided, let us say, the spirit, but Dr. Berliner gave it the flesh required to live.



# LECTURE ONE

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# The Role of Philosophy

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If people who do not know what philosophy is and what it deals with attack it, that is not very significant. And there are, of course, a great many such people, people to whom philosophy stands only for a few disconnected bromides or sayings. They have no actual idea what the subject deals with, what the content of the topics are, or with its structure or organization.

If people *do* know something about what philosophy deals with, but equate philosophy with the worst, most irrational ideas—I mean people who equate it with self-sacrifice, or communism, or skepticism, or Linguistic Analysis—if those people attack it, it also doesn't mean very much.

But what about a different sort of person? I'm thinking of a person who knows, in some terms, what philosophy is. He knows its main branches, the issues it deals with, the overall structure of the subject, and, let us say, he has read Ayn Rand, and he is even sympathetic to her viewpoint—he's an advocate of egoism, and he's an atheist, and he's an advocate of capitalism, and so forth. What if people who fit *that* description attack philosophy? Yet every so often, I hear arguments against philosophy from such people. And, unless you lead a very insulated existence, you must all have heard them, too.

I want to begin this course on understanding Objectivism by giving you the three leading arguments (at least in my experience) against philosophy. Each of them claims that a happy man can't live according to a philosophy—not *any* philosophy, whether Objectivist or otherwise. They claim that every philosophy leads inevitably to serious problems for the person who holds it, problems that far outweigh whatever value the philosophy brings, so that philosophy is basically a source of harm, a grief to people. And the way to be happy, according to these arguments, is to kiss it good-bye and become a-philosophical, or anti-philosophical.

These arguments have been raised to me across the years by people from many different viewpoints, including former Objectivists. I say "former," because once they turn anti-philosophical, they usually abandon any philosophic affiliation. Some of these people I do not like or respect. But some I do. Some are honest, even if, in my judgment, they are badly mistaken; they sincerely believe these arguments, and sometimes they're very torn about them—they don't know what to answer, how to answer, or whether there *is* an answer.

I want to start by facing these issues head-on. These arguments are rarely formulated in detail, the way I will present them to you sympathetically. I disagree with them, of course, but the answers come much later in the course. The point now is this: Can you answer these arguments? Do you feel that there is something, anything at all, to them? Can I get to you for even a minute with regard to any one of them? Does any of them have a trace of momentary plausibility to you? For your own sake, I ask you to be fair; don't simply dismiss them out of hand because you know that I'm going to slaughter them in the fullness of time. If you actually confront them honestly, you will find that it is very helpful as a self-diagnosis, in regard to whether you understand Objectivism or not. (All my examples, by the way, are real—that is to say, they're taken from things actually said to me at least once.)

*Number one: Philosophy stifles individuality or the self.* Here is the argument: Philosophy, by definition, lays down a whole series of principles, telling people how to think, what to think, and what to value. It says, "Here is the truth on every important issue," including issues of value. It lays down rules on what you should believe, on every conceivable subject of significance: what you should think, do, feel. By definition, the argument continues, this leaves little or no room for individuality, for valuing or doing something that expresses your distinctive nature, your personal essence, your own

self. The whole idea of philosophy, according to this argument—and this would be especially true of philosophy that claims objectivity—the whole idea of a philosophy is to bring yourself under—universal, impartial rules, rules that apply to *all* men at *all* times; the whole idea is to start to live in conformity with such rules, whether you like it or not. What does that mean? According to this argument, you have to repress your own personal self and start to behave like all the other advocates of that philosophy. You have to, in effect, become a robot or a follower, programmed to be just like all the other followers.

That is the abstract statement of this first argument. Now, let's take some examples. Lifestyles—take a young man, for instance, who discovers Objectivism, accepts it as true, loves *The Fountainhead*, but does not like skyscrapers. And there are such people. The sight of New York does not fill him with ecstasy—he may find it distasteful, noisy, dirty—he would much rather live on a ranch in California, or on an island in the Caribbean. The argument goes, if he gets into Objectivism, he's soon going to absorb the message “skyscrapers represent the heroic in man—greatness, achievement”—and his attitude, therefore, is anti-achievement, anti-man, and so on. He is indifferent to the good, and perhaps even an example of hatred of the good. And therefore he's wrong, he's low, he's bad. What's the result? If this boy tries sincerely to be a good Objectivist, he has to beat down this heretical feeling; he has to become a pro-skyscraper champion like everybody else, in the name of fidelity to his philosophy. But the price, therefore, is to cut himself off from his real feelings (in this case, the real lifestyle that he wants). He has to turn himself into what used to be called an other-directed, or an unreal, person, a mere follower.

Or take a case from art: Beethoven is the obvious example here. A person hears and is moved, deeply moved and stirred, by Beethoven's symphonies. Then he discovers esthetics; he discovers the Objectivist esthetics. He discovers that art is a sense of life issue, that it reveals your basic values, that your tastes reflect your metaphysical view of life. And then he hears that Ayn Rand personally disliked Beethoven, that she regarded his music as “malevolent universe”—that is, anti-values, anti-success, anti-man, the voice of doom. It would be the same pattern as with the skyscraper. Perhaps the person will consciously disavow Beethoven. Perhaps he'll just shy away from the issue and feel uncomfortable. But either way, his real personality, his tastes, his preferences are not being expressed. Instead, he's pushing the attitude that he has been taught is right.

I know a talented, creative artist, a Romantic artist, who believes that philosophy is incompatible with creativity. And his is a very sincere belief, because to be creative, this person feels, you have to be open to the new, to experiment. You have to give your subconscious absolute freedom in order to be able to come up with the groundbreaking, the untried, that which has so far never been conceived. But if you accept a philosophy, this artist feels, you get caged in with a whole set of esthetic rules telling you “art must be this, and it can't be that; this school is good, that one is based on determinism and so on and so on.” The result is that your subconscious is frozen in advance. If you take it seriously and really try to follow it, this person holds, you end up turning out inferior copies of whatever school or trend the philosophy happens to approve, instead of turning out your own individual works.

You can see how this sort of argument could be extended across the board. A person involved with Objectivism might repress his real career choice in order to obey the Objectivist idea of productivity. I'm sure you must have met a woman who wants children, who does not want a professional career in industry or the professions, like Dagny [Taggart, in *Atlas Shrugged*], and who feels she's inferior, she's guilty, she's violating the highest standards of Objectivist productivity thereby. A person might repress his real love or friend in the name of having the right kind, according to his philosophy, and so on and so on.

All of these people find themselves in the following position: If they pursue their own self, they feel guilty; if they repress it, they feel emptiness and frustration; so they're lost either way. So the

conclusion they come to is that the problem, the culprit, is the attempt to impose a philosophy, any philosophy, on a person's individuality. By contrast, the man on the street seems to have a wonderful freedom, because he is in this position: It is not true that everything is significant for him. It's not true that all of life is a federal case. He doesn't need to be proving something every minute about what he likes and dislikes; he can be and do whatever he wants, and there's no censor, no rules, no guilt.

Ask yourself: How many people here desire something—it can be in the realm of vocation, career, sexual style, I don't care—something that you feel is perhaps not 100 percent Objectivism, as expressed in Ayn Rand's novels, and yet this is something that is important to you personally? If so, then ultimately you're going to have a problem. You will feel guilt, most likely, and then the pattern that you will repress it, and then in time you will resent the necessity to repress what matters to you, and then in time it is good-bye. I've seen this happen many times.

This is an important issue, and it's part of the real need for this course on understanding Objectivism—to deal with and analyze this kind of problem with many actual, real-life examples, so that we can see what is and is not involved in living by a philosophy.

I want now to present a psychological variation of this same argument, and it goes as follows: If everybody were brought up as an Objectivist, and they were in an Objectivist world from the beginning, that would be fine, no problem. If they were taught only Objectivist ideas, their whole psychology would presumably be based on those ideas; everything about the person would be consistent, integrated—it would be terrific. But in actual fact, they say, life is not like that. People are brought up by irrational, or at least inadequate, parents, to say nothing of the environment—their neighbors, their teachers, politicians, and all the rest of it. The result is that by the time they discover Objectivism, they're filled with contrary ideas and with neuroses. Most often, they don't even *know* their subconscious ideas—they don't know how they got them, when they were drilled into them, or how to get rid of them. Then they hear Objectivism, and their mind approves, and they're left with a tremendous clash: the legacy of their upbringing versus a rational philosophy. And they're caught between the two, forever trying to fight their childhood conclusions, doomed to a life of inner conflict.

An example that I've heard a lot of times goes like this: Take a person brought up in a horrendously bad, irrational home, who never formed a strong career value or a strong career passion. His life was such a jungle growing up that it took his full strength just to survive it. But he preserved his mind, he heard Objectivism, he comes into it, he agrees, and he hears now "Career is a crucial top value." And he would like to have a career passion, but he cannot find one in him. He searches, and he can't find the kind of interests or values that he could start off with and build on. He's confronted with a blank. If he were a nonphilosophical person, he would still suffer scars from his upbringing; perhaps he never would be happy; but at least, the argument goes, he could at least struggle on, he could get something from other aspects of life. But if he's an Objectivist, he has the constant mandate hanging over him, the image of Roark. And therefore, by contrast, through constant self-criticism and self-condemnation he's doomed to guilt for life.

Common to all the examples is the clash between an individual's feelings and philosophy. In the first cases, the person believed a feeling was him; in some sense, he was proud of it, it gave him pleasure; and then he felt philosophy is putting him down, squelching him as an individual. In this career case, he sincerely doesn't like the feeling—he wishes he had a career passion; he doesn't regard it as his essence that he's proud of—he wishes to high heaven he could get rid of it; but he can't, so he's condemned to a life of cursing himself. Again, what's common to them all is: "Myself—good or bad, like it or not, but me—versus philosophy."

In regard to the psychological variant, you might say, "There's an easy solution. If you have such deep problems, go find a psychotherapist." You might say, "True, it's often hard to find your own basic premises, uproot them, reintegrate them, and so on, but that's just what psychotherapy is for. So

if you go and you work and you introspect and so on, in time you'll resolve the clash; all will be well

I promise the answer you'll get is the answer I get—"What do you mean by 'in time'? How long?" Then the person says, "If psychology were so advanced, and psychotherapy so efficient that we could in a reasonable time identify and eradicate all of our bad premises, terrific. What's a reasonable time? Six months? Six years?" There are a lot of people who would go for six years. They think that would be a great investment. But, the argument says, in many cases, a person has problems of such a kind that with today's knowledge they're actually insoluble. He can go to a therapist—a good, rational, efficient therapist—he can sincerely try—but because of the primitive level of psychological knowledge in the world today, and the immense difficulties in changing a whole entrenched psychology, maybe *ten* years would not be enough, *twenty*, in order to change certain types of traits. So, the person concludes, "I'm condemned to fight *an entire life* of inner conflict if I continue to hold before myself a theoretical ideal of what I should be. But on the other hand, what if I say, 'I've got to be realistic—I can't change this attitude. I've tried, but it's immovable; that's how I'm going to be until I die,' so rather than perpetual conflict, I say, 'To hell with philosophy. I'm simply not built for it. I'm a certain way, call it sick or neurotic or warped, whatever you want, but I can't do anything about it, and I resign.'"

So, in one variant here, the person says, "This is me, and I want to be this way, and philosophy stamps me down," and the other says, "This is me, and I *don't* want to be this way, but I have no choice, I have to, and again, philosophy stamps me down." So in either case, there is constant inner conflict. And that is the argument of philosophy versus the individual, or philosophy versus the self.

*Number two: Philosophy causes a life of outer conflict, or cultural alienation.* It's philosophy versus the world. And here's the abstract argument:

Philosophy, by definition, lays down a set of rules and principles by which you should evaluate the things around you—other people, government practices, religions, everything. A person with a definite philosophy, therefore, is always judgmental; he's always saying, "This is right, true, good," or "That is wrong, false, bad." The world around you, however, rarely shares your philosophy. Sometimes a person may be in harmony with his environment, such as a very religious man at the height of the Middle Ages—so this argument wouldn't apply to him. But usually, the argument goes, the philosophically consistent person is at variance with the world. And this is *true*, because: He is consistent, the world is contradictory; he has a thought-out definite system, the world is eclectic; he has high standards, the world is pragmatic or expedient; he is independent, and most people, by definition, are conventional. So the philosophical person is in the position of constantly condemning what he sees around him, constantly running the world down as contrary to *his* standards, *his* principles, *his* values. Most cultures, after all, are a grab bag, a mixture of all kinds of elements, and most people are not very consistent, and the result is that there will be a tremendous amount to criticize from the point of view of *any* philosophy.

Now, the argument goes on, this is particularly true of Objectivism. Here is a revolutionary philosophy. It attacks wholesale the basic principles of the last twenty-five hundred years. It's confronting a society that reflects in countless ways, large and small, the exact opposite ideas. The result is that a sincere Objectivist has to live a life of cultural alienation. He has to feel constantly like an outsider, or a victim, or an outcast, facing a corrupt, hostile world. He's in effect a loner trapped among hordes of the irrational, the unjust. And on top of that, he can't simply remain silent, because he knows the principle that you mustn't sanction evil—you have to condemn it in order to be just—so his whole life becomes a protracted battle, a constant conflict with the people around him. His emotional feel of life, as a result, is loneliness, malevolence, trouble, pessimism. If he meets someone at a party, he can't, like an ordinary person, just chat over a drink, relax, and enjoy it. Whatever he talks about soon generates some sort of philosophic issue, because philosophy is everywhere. And the

next thing you know, he's in a fight over religion, or politics, or something else. Even if he keeps quiet at the party, he's on edge, he's tense, he doesn't know what the next statement by some person or group is going to be, or what they're going to say that he'll have to jump in and condemn in order to be true to his principles. So, leaving aside a few soul mates as isolated and in despair as he, his social life is continual anxiety, trouble, unpleasantness. If he goes to a movie—say he goes to see *E.T.*—he can't simply settle back and enjoy it like everybody else, because, since he's philosophical, he has to analyze it, he has to see it as a cultural symbol. And sure enough, in today's world, he's going to find all kinds of errors or evils in just about everything, which will end up putting the damper on, or entirely destroying, his enjoyment. *E.T.*, for instance, is definitely anti-adult; it's anti-science. Therefore, I've heard a number of people say it's an evil, irrational movie. (I can't resist saying that I love that movie. But more on that later.)

If an Objectivist goes to class at college, he supposedly either has to feel fear of what his professors are going to say, because he knows he's going to have to disagree and therefore be subject to the class's ridicule, or, at minimum, he's going to be filled with disgust, contempt, revulsion. Even if he goes to a party of Objectivists, he cannot have a good time, because he has to spend the evening on philosophy, on big issues. Everything has to be intellectual, and they end up discussing how awful the world is. And if somebody at the party just wants to relax, forget his troubles for the night, he stands a good chance of being accused of being evasive and anti-intellectual.

The conclusion of this argument is that it is simply not worth living if life is nothing but struggle, tension, condemnation, loneliness, and gloom. What's the solution? Get rid of the root of it all—this judgmental attitude, this constant concern with right or wrong, true or false—get rid of philosophy, and then simply enjoy yourself, like the man on the street (again, the symbol of a blissful existence). He just takes the world as it is. If he likes a movie, it would never occur to him to analyze it; if he meets someone at a party, he couldn't care less what that person thinks; he accepts the rule “never argue about religion or politics”; he's free, he's cheerful, he has no sense of being a cornered victim in a malevolent world. How does he do it? He's not enslaved by a philosophy.

Thus, according to the first argument, it's the self versus philosophy, or the inner world versus philosophy; and according to the second, it's the outer world versus philosophy. So it's a twofold torture chamber.

And that brings us to the last argument, which is the briefest, but it puts the capper on the first two. Why go through all this torture for nothing? Why for nothing? Because, argument number three claims, *philosophy is basically useless*.

The standard version of this you know: Who needs philosophy? It's all empty talk. But the version that I have in mind is more sophisticated: True, philosophy is important when you're young, or when you first discover it; it helps set your basic direction. You're swamped by so many possibilities and choices at that point, and you have no firm ideas as to what to choose or how. You're confronted with a mass of possible careers and religions and friends and lifestyles, you're just drowning in possibilities. You need a guide, so philosophy is really important or helpful at this stage; it kind of orients you to life.

But, the argument goes on, at a certain point your basic direction has been established. For example, if you come to Objectivism, you pretty soon give up religion, you resign from the Socialist Party, you reject a progressive education for your children, you pick out an appropriate career and a hardworking lifestyle, you choose certain appropriate friends, and so on. At this point, the argument asks, what more do you get out of philosophy? Of course, if you're a professional intellectual, then you might need philosophy, because you're actively dealing with its issues all the time. But what if you're not an intellectual? Suppose you're a full-time mother, or a businessman, or a lawyer, or a sculptor? All your basic decisions in life are made. So what do you do with philosophy then? What do you get from it?

Your career is set, and most of your time is spent pursuing it. And philosophy is irrelevant to you there. ~~You try cases or treat patients or sell bread, without need of any further philosophy.~~ Your daily activities are set, your friends, your routines, your lifestyle—and you are overwhelmed with the demands and concretes of daily existence. Who has time for philosophy, and what for? The way I’ve sometimes heard this point is—What does being an Objectivist consist of? What do you do with Objectivism other than attend lectures by Peikoff?

I was discussing this argument recently with a friend, and he made the very perceptive comment that this argument is like deism in religion. In religion, there are three camps: the true believers, who hold that God is all-powerful and determines everything; the deists, who say no, God is necessary to start the universe off, but after that he retires from the scene and simply watches disinterestedly with no power to interfere; and then the atheists, who say, “If we can get along without God for all those millennia, we can get along without Him at the very beginning, too.” A very valid development. A natural law without God altogether is the only consistent alternative. Deism was merely a stage in the atrophy of religion, and the logical finale was atheism. So I think you see the parallel here. The view that philosophy is necessary to start us off in a certain direction but thereafter is useless in life is like the deism of this issue, and it leads in logic to the same result—namely, that philosophy is dispensable even at the beginning, because there is then some other way of reaching conclusions or making decisions in life, some nonphilosophical way. And if that can work for the last forty or fifty years of your life, it can work for all of your life in principle just as well.

So this argument, despite its appearance of making concessions to philosophy, really amounts to an attack on the usefulness of philosophy *as such*, at *any* point. It all comes down to the question, “If I intend to be a decent, hardworking person, what on earth do I need philosophy for in my daily life?”

That states the three arguments in essence. What is their common denominator? The separation of philosophy from life, the dichotomy of philosophy versus life. Philosophy is regarded as either useless in living, removed from life, or a positive harm and hindrance to living, so that there’s life and there’s philosophy, and you have to choose.

This viewpoint is extremely widespread today; it is not confined to onetime Objectivists (although I focused on them for our purposes). The whole culture is saturated with anti-philosophical ideas. We could divide people into various categories on this basis, and you’d see how tremendously common the viewpoint is. In one category would be the explicit skeptics about philosophy, those who openly scorn it as a waste of time, hot air, no cash value—I mean the type of person for whom any term descriptive of thought as such means removed from life. For instance, they say, “It’s abstract,” and to them, “abstract” means nothing to do with concrete reality; it’s academic or scholastic, and to them, what goes on in academies or schools, by definition, has nothing to do with reality; it’s “theoretical,” and of course therefore has nothing to do with practice; and so on. In another category would be those who profess certain philosophic ideas, and even respect them in a way, but who are careful to keep them as a side issue in their lives, without any central, ruling influence. This is what Ayn Rand called the “church on Sundays” attitude: One day a week, or a month, I pay homage to my ideas, but the rest of the time, in self-preservation, I forget about them and get on with the business of living. This is only a variant of the outright skeptic, because they both agree on the actual irrelevance of philosophy to life; the skeptic merely dispenses with the need of a weekly ritual. And last, just to complete this survey, there’s another type of person—one who *does* take ideas seriously and really tries to live by them day and night. And where do the examples in *quantity* come from of this type? Only two sources that I know—religions and totalitarian movements. Nuns who retire from the world, renounce sex, take a vow of poverty, never speak, and so on; they live by what they preach all the time, or at least enough of it so that they’re allowed the rest off. Or Nazis and Communists, who give up everything, body and soul, to the party. This third category embraces fanatics who sacrifice their lives *to* their

philosophy. They, too, agree that it's your life or your philosophy, and then they merely give up their lives for philosophy. But the basic issue is still the same: life or philosophy. *Everybody* agrees—or almost everybody—that philosophy is removed from life. And the arguments I began with are only a kind of in-group version of this same basic attitude.

And yet Objectivists know—they *should* know—that something is wrong with all of this. Philosophy is not self-sacrifice. According to Objectivism, it's the means, the indispensable means, of achieving self-interest, prosperity, the enjoyment of life. So we know—or should—that philosophy is *not* detached from life, that it's not an impediment to living, but a vital necessity. So I'm turning now to the opposite viewpoint, the Objectivist viewpoint. I'm not yet answering the arguments I gave you. I'm merely reminding you of the exact opposite attitude to philosophy: that philosophy is the exact reverse of those three arguments. According to Objectivism, philosophy is essential to creating a self to dealing with the world, to managing *at all* in daily life.

This course presupposes familiarity with Ayn Rand's works, with my lectures, and so on, so I'm going to be very brief on this part because I want to cover new material. This is in the nature of a reminder, and if you are here for the very first time, if you don't know anything about Objectivism, this is the wrong lecture to be at, because I'm taking for granted a context that will leave you utterly baffled. This is definitely aimed at an audience that already has an extensive knowledge of Objectivism. Therefore, to you, I'm merely reminding you what philosophy is. It's a science of fundamental ideas, the science that tells you the nature of the world, of man, of man's means of knowledge, and on that basis offers a code of values to guide his choices, actions, products, institutions. Do we need it? You've all read "Philosophy: Who Needs It" [the title essay in Ayn Rand's 1982 book]. You know that man needs philosophy by his essential nature. His mind needs the conclusions of philosophy to function at all. He has to know: what is reality, and can he count on it; what is knowledge, and how is it obtained; what is the good, and how should it be pursued? Does philosophy have any actual role in life? You must have read *The Ominous Parallels* [by Leonard Peikoff, 1982]. I claimed there, and I believe I proved, that philosophy is the factor ultimately moving everyone and everything, that it's inescapable even by people who denounce it, that it's responsible for the trends in economics, art, politics, literature, education, youth movements, movies, people's psychology, you name it.

What do you get out of holding a definite philosophy? When I was a college student, they used to say to freshmen—and they used to say this about philosophy in general to motivate; and it applies more to Objectivism inasmuch as it's a rational philosophy—they used to tell us that from philosophy you get a sense of certainty, as against agonizing doubt; you get a basic self-confidence, a sense of intellectual control, of control over your own mind and its method of thinking; you gain a fundamental understanding of the world, of why things are as they are, of what can be changed and what can't; and you get a sense of purpose, of priorities, of values, of what's important as against what's trivial, what counts in life, where you're going, what you need to know and do to be happy. That was the kind of speech that they used to give to freshmen in my day. And it's all true. Philosophy does all this and much more.

The man on the street whom the anti-philosophic arguments regard as blissfully free of philosophy (assuming he really is unphilosophical) is actually harmed by that fact, because however decent and nice he is, to him, the world is basically a mystery. He cannot fathom what is going on. And if he *is* decent, to that very extent, he can make no sense of the injustices he sees. He's not even sure that there *are* injustices, or what injustice *is*. He doesn't know, he has no answers, he doesn't even have any clear questions. He has no method to begin to untangle it all. So he just pulls his horns in and scrapes by. He may be productive, but he has no sense of control. He can't question or challenge in any serious way, and, quite without his knowledge or consent, he's being led systematically, step by step, to



disaster.

So we can say this: On the one hand, philosophy is critically important; it—especially Objectivism—is a life-giving value; but on the other hand, there are all these arguments that philosophy is really a bane and not a blessing. So it's like A and non-A. What is the resolution?

I'm not going to answer in this lecture the three arguments that I started with. Each of them is complex, a mixture of several elements. Each of them has some valid points; they point to some real problems involved in living (albeit misapplied with the wrong conclusion). Each has many confusions that need painstaking straightening out. And they contain some very concrete errors about Objectivism. Objectivism does not, for instance, say that you have to like skyscrapers or that you have to come to lectures. But for detailed answers, you'll have to await the last half of this course. The argument about the uselessness of philosophy we're covering in lecture nine. Philosophy versus the self is ten and part of eleven, and philosophy versus the world is part of ten and eleven. So you've got a long time to wait. But this is a course, not a self-contained lecture, and so we have to lay a whole groundwork first.

What I want to do now is simply state, in general terms, the basic error common to all three of the arguments, the *basic* cause of people raising them, whatever else is involved. *More* than this is involved, but this is the basic cause.

The cause of the problems mentioned in all of these arguments is not philosophy, or Objectivism, but philosophy or Objectivism wrongly understood. And I don't mean here specific concrete errors; I mean wrongly understood in a fundamental, all-embracing way. Put another way—the cause is Objectivism improperly digested or assimilated. Or put still another way—the cause is Objectivism held as a series of abstractions not tied to reality. If a person did understand Objectivism—I'm using the word “understand” in a specific way: I mean grasping it in its actual relation to reality, not as floating generalities—I would say such a person, whatever problems he has, would not raise the arguments I mentioned. And I want now to develop this theme.

Nobody, certainly nobody sane and honest, could say, “Let's get rid of reality. It's too much trouble. It interferes with my self-expression, or it causes grief in dealing with other people, or it's useless in daily life.” Reality, by definition, is all there is; it's what we live in and deal with every moment; and it's what we have to conform to if we are to survive and function at all, let alone prosper.

On the perceptual level, the level of sensory perception, there's no argument about this. If you started to walk into the path of a speeding truck, and someone screamed out to you, “Watch out for the truck!” no one apart from a deliberate suicide would dream of answering the following: “Don't try to impose rules on me, I want to express myself.” Or, “I don't have views on trucks, because I don't want to argue all the time, and people have so many different ideas about trucks.” Or, “I've already seen all the trucks I need to in my life when I was young; looking is a waste of time for me now, I'm too busy.”

On the perceptual level, that is the analogue of the three arguments against philosophy. On that level, reality confronts us immediately, concretely, inescapably, and is not a matter of debate. The point is that this does not happen on the *conceptual* level—that is, the level of ideas, abstractions, thought. On that level, a gap is possible; an idea, sincerely held, mind you, but utterly unconnected to the world; and that is what makes possible a disdain for ideas. If ideas—and I mean here abstract philosophical ideas—were held by people with the same immediacy, the same reality, the same relation to actual perceptual concretes as the way we see trucks, none of the anti-philosophical line could arise, because it would be immediately obvious that it was an anti-reality line. If a person saw his philosophy in every concrete, and I mean see it, *really* see it, the way he now sees trucks, then no problems of the kind mentioned could arise. The person might still have problems with himself or with people, but he wouldn't have problems with philosophy; he wouldn't think the solution was to

abandon philosophy.

The issue, therefore, is that many people, including a lot of honest, well-meaning, perfectly sincere people, do not see their philosophy that way. Let me put the exact same point in a different terminology, because it will illuminate another aspect. The essence of being in favor of reason is *proving* your ideas, *validating*, as against going by faith or blindly following authority. What does proving an idea consist of? Proof is *not* some formalized, ritualized deduction that would satisfy a pack of desiccated scholars somewhere. It is *not* some tricky, convoluted rigmarole designed to outwit dishonest adversaries. Proof is a very simple thing, and it is utterly nonsocial. It is the method of seeing firsthand that your ideas come from reality, that they actually reflect or correspond to facts of reality. That's all. Proof is really nothing but taking an abstract idea and endowing it with the vividness, the immediacy, the compelling quality of the percept of the truck that we talked about. So you really proved an idea, it should stand in your mind like that truck, as a fact that is there, real, perceivable, unanswerable, absolute.

Of course, this is easy to say but hard to do. The question is: How do you achieve this state? How do you get your ideas, particularly philosophic ideas, into this kind of relation to reality? How do you take broad abstractions and make them, in your mind, seem like obvious transcripts of reality, so immediate that to you they are like percepts with all that clarity and compelling power? That is the question. And that is what I mean when I say that we have to learn to understand philosophic ideas and specifically Objectivism—I mean, grasp their relation to reality.

In a way, this problem exists for *all* abstractions, in any area or subject matter, whether philosophy or not. You know from the Objectivist epistemology that abstractions are symbols, shorthand symbols for integrations of concretes to enable us to deal with countless instances by a single word, held in a single frame of consciousness. And as such, abstractions by their nature are a step removed from reality. You know that there is a whole series of levels that get farther and farther removed: There are actual trucks that you can point to; then there is the concept “truck,” which is a unit in your mind for which you have to think, “What does it stand for?” to connect it to reality; and then there's “vehicle,” which is still broader, and includes trucks and cars and boats and so on, and is another step removed, and so on. And you know that there are all sorts of devices and methods inherent in concepts and necessary to keep them connected to reality, such as giving examples, offering definitions, and a lot more.

So the problem of understanding abstractions, keeping them tied to reality, exists for *all* abstractions. But the point I want to make now is that it is hardest and worst in regard to philosophy, because philosophy deals with the broadest abstractions. It's the most universal. You can look at it this way: Philosophy is at once the easiest and the hardest subject there is. It's the hardest and easiest subject there is for the same reason: It's the most universal. Therefore, in one way, it's the easiest—you don't need any specialized knowledge, it deals only with issues available at all times in all places to all professions; to engage in philosophy, you don't need to know science, engineering, medicine, no specialized knowledge; you just have to look at the world and grasp what's available in every age to every man; and in that way, it's the easiest. But in another sense, it's the hardest, because it is tremendously abstract. Here, your symbols, your words, are covering not just trucks, but existence, the totality; not just a toothache, but consciousness; not just going to a movie, but freedom or happiness. These types of concepts—“existence,” “consciousness,” “freedom,” and so on—have so many concretes of such a bewildering variety, in so many different contexts and applications, and yet in philosophy, somehow, we have to hold this wealth of concretes together, disregard all these concrete differences, and move in a continual realm of tremendous abstraction. And most people simply cannot do it. They can grasp the ideas, but only by cutting loose from reality, only by forgetting about trucks, toothaches, movies, and so on, and functioning in a world made only of words, of abstractions. They

don't know how to keep this level of abstraction connected to daily life, to actual reality—the reality they live in, work with, perceive. So for them, whatever their intentions, philosophy ends up like church on Sunday: It's something disassociated from life. It's a special occasional ritual; they may be sincere, but they can't keep it real. That's what it comes down to.

Here is the deeper reason—an epistemological reason—why philosophy is so widely scorned. It's not only because of the wrong ideas of philosophy that people have. It's the very nature of abstractions, of the difficulty that abstractions present to us, and that difficulty comes out worst in regard to philosophy.

To carry this a step further, if philosophy is the easiest yet the hardest subject, the same goes in spades for Objectivism. I could make a case that it's the easiest of all philosophies to assimilate and the hardest. Why the easiest? Because it's true. It's actually based on reality. That makes it much easier to grasp than fantasies about a supernatural dimension and the beauty of self-immolation for the collective unconscious. On the other hand, precisely because it does throw out fantasies, it's of no use at all if it's held in a cut-off-from-reality fashion. A false philosophy, to an extent, must be divorced from reality. And to that extent, it is not so difficult to hold. You don't have to work to see its relation to reality; it *has* no relation to reality; it's like a fairy tale, and you can usually follow it without much work or difficulty, no matter how weird it gets. There's no problem struggling to tie it in to reality, because the whole system says, in effect, "This is above reality; this is another dimension; you shouldn't think; just have faith, believe," and so on. But in Objectivism, by contrast, the whole thing about it—in every principle and detail—the whole thing is the tie to reality, to the concretes around us. Precisely because it is true, there is a tremendous amount of work involved in holding it, in keeping it connected to reality. And this is a giant task that is not imposed by a false philosophy. If you forget reality while reading Kant, that's not a problem; it can be very helpful. But if you forget reality in regard to Objectivism, it becomes ludicrous, and the whole thing is pointless.

However, it is not obvious how to keep a philosophy tied to reality. In fact, it's a very difficult and very rare feat. Good intentions and sincerity are not enough for this. You need a definite method of dealing with ideas, a method that is not self-evident. And I want to elaborate on that point.

I have watched Objectivists for many years—starting, I may say, with myself and my own struggles—try to assimilate the ideas of Objectivism. I've watched them try to grasp the proof, the tie to reality, in that truck-like fashion. I've seen well-meaning, educated students—intelligent, motivated, hardworking—I've seen them read all the materials, take courses in Objectivism, and yet they cannot really do it; they cannot digest the material. They can't do it with their eye steadily on reality. However much they try and wrestle with the material, it does not jell in their minds into a lucid, unanswerable perception of reality. They end up seeing it, in effect, as though through a glass darkly, or in a kind of fog.

I hasten to add that I myself went through a long period in this state, and by a long period I mean at least fifteen years, and that was my full-time field. At first I thought that everyone else understood both me, and that the problem was my own deficiencies. But eventually I saw the same problem and pattern repeated on person after person, and I came to conclude that a special method is necessary to grasp philosophy and keep it reality-oriented, a method with many aspects and specific steps calculated to add up in keeping ideas real. And I worked off and on for a number of years to define this method. Most recently we held a seminar with several very advanced Objectivists exploring our mutual mental processes—the method we used, the problems in understanding the ideas, what was really clear to them, what was not, how to make it better. And that is actually how this course arose, and what it's really all about. It's in effect tips from a veteran on how to really understand Objectivism. But what you have to see clearly at the outset is *why* a special method is necessary.

Many people have the idea that they can read a book on philosophy or Objectivism—now, we mean

here that they're reading it in focus, they're sincere, they follow carefully—and they think that if they do that, and then at the end say, “This makes sense, I agree,” that that constitutes understanding. It does not. Reading is not enough. The same is true of lectures. You can listen to someone else, the most wonderful lecturer in history, and you can be focused, sincere, honest, but that does not yield understanding in the sense we're talking about. I'm not downplaying reading or listening; that's obviously important, it's vital, it's the first step in learning a new philosophy. But the point is, it's only the first step. There's a whole process that has to come after that if you are to reach the stage of seeing, knowing, really grasping. There's a whole series of intervening steps required to bridge the gap. And I gave myself the assignment to try to identify the major steps that had to intervene. I do not have the last word on this question, but I think I have *some* word.

The question I set was this: Assuming that a person listens to a philosophy lecture or reads a book completely attentively, what else then has to go on in his mind in order for the ideas to emerge at the end as real knowledge that he possesses? My answer is essentially offered in this course. Without these steps, I believe, the best book or lecture simply fades away in your mind, and it has to by the very nature of thought, because the essence of these intermediate steps is how to make the material an actual part of your thinking, of your perception of reality. If you don't know the steps, if you don't perform them, then the material never becomes a part of you. It becomes merely the memory of somebody else's words. And however eloquent they are, that is necessarily a peripheral issue in your life; it has to fade away in time; it has to remain a side issue, because it has no real functioning reality in your mind. So reading and listening are not enough.

Something else is not enough. People often confuse *summarizing* an idea with *understanding* it. It is not enough to be able to give a summary, even a good, accurate summary. A summary does not signify understanding, in the sense that we're using it—that is, that's reality-based, like the perception of the truck. It is possible (and common) to give a very clear, accurate summary of an idea that is nevertheless floating and detached from reality.

Take the virtue of honesty, a topic we're going to be covering later in the course. In the seminar that I mentioned, a very intelligent woman whom I like and greatly admire gave a good example of this point. She volunteered to present her understanding of the virtue of honesty, of why you should be honest in life. She proceeded to give the following kind of statement: “If life is the standard of value, then the top virtue has to be rationality, exercising your mind. Rationality means grasping the facts of reality that you deal with. Honesty has to be a part of this, because it tells you not to evade reality or pretend. And therefore, you should be honest.”

I think that is about how the virtue of honesty stands in the minds of many Objectivists. And that's assuming even that they remember the proof up to *that* point (that is, the connection to rationality, and life as the standard, and so on). I'm not putting down summaries. I spend a lot of time giving summaries; half of my lectures are summaries. And what she did is certainly okay as a summary. But the point is: If that is what you have in your mind in regard to honesty, that is not the same as understanding, not in the way that we're talking about. The statement that she gave is simply a series of very broad abstractions, with no indication of the tie to actual facts. The summary mentioned “grasping reality”—what does it *mean* to grasp the facts of reality? When you hear that, does your mind flood with examples, or does it stall, freeze, go blank at the question? What does it mean to evade? I'm *not* asking here for some formal definition. But what concretes does the term actually stand for? Why, for example, does a liar have to evade? Can't he know the truth for himself, and merely lie to others? So it's not enough to just say, “Don't evade.” Why does life require *complete* honesty? Why can't you be honest *most* of the time, but occasionally lie? That doesn't mean you're evading all of reality. Can't you still live and function and be happy? In other words, there is a tremendous gap between that brief abstract summary statement and a real, concrete, overwhelming

understanding of the virtue of honesty.

~~In the seminar, we spent maybe five hours on this one virtue, and we're going to be trying to cover that in lecture three of this course. The summary, in short, is merely like a headline over a long newspaper article. If you know the article, it's fine to be able to state the headline. But if all you know is the summary, it doesn't do you any good.~~

So we need a method of processing abstractions, and the method is not obvious. Just in case you think you already have anticipated me entirely, the method is *not* merely giving definitions to your terms. This is a topic that I think has been overdone. Sometimes, of course, you need definitions. But sometimes definitions can be positively harmful to your mental process. Nor does the method consist merely of concretizing or giving examples; that's just the tip of the iceberg. These are all topics for the next lectures as we develop the method. The point is that the process of digesting ideas is not self-evident. It has to be learned as a deliberate assignment.

No human skill is automatic. Each has to be learned. Whether you're talking about walking, or typing, or making love, or cooking, it doesn't make any difference. There are no innate ideas. You can compare learning in order to understand philosophy with learning how to cook. Nobody would think that you could read a cookbook or attend a course—even one with exciting demonstrations—listen intently, and then emerge knowing how to cook. You could come out with a summary, but you would not be an accomplished cook. I'm certainly not putting down lectures on cooking; I've gone to them, they're very interesting, and you can grasp a great deal this way. That's the only way, basically—in some form of reading or listening—to take in all the earlier thought and knowledge on the subject. But if all you do is read or listen, it's soon going to fade; you're going to forget your lectures just as if they had never taken place. What do you have to do? You have to cook. You have to enter a kitchen. You have to make things. You have to make the theory that you learned abstractly a part of you. You have to see it in connection with the reality around you. And in that case, your kitchen is the reality. For instance, you may have heard a lecture on saucepans, on all the types and what you should use for what kind of soufflé. Then you come into reality, your kitchen, you look at your own pans, and you have to decide, “Can I make this recipe with this pan or not?” What was the reason that you needed X size? You have to work it out and try. You have to connect your theoretical knowledge to your concrete kitchen. You may have had a whole lecture on a food processor, and you were told to press the button to start it. But now you look at it, and one way is “Pulse” and the other is “Steady”—which way do you press it? There are millions and millions of questions in order to pass from the generalized knowledge of even a brilliant lecture on cooking to the actual reality-connected knowledge of an accomplished cook.

Philosophy is the same, only more so, because the abstractions are so wide. You need to actually philosophize in order to make the material part of you. You have to enter the philosophical kitchen and work with the material from the books and the lectures. Now we can drop the analogy and just say it straight. The real goal has to be to learn to derive your philosophy from reality as though you were the first creator of it. Having heard the lectures and read the books, you have to then forget all summaries, all the lecture notes, and go back to reality and learn to grasp the philosophic idea from what you directly perceive and what you know about yourself.

Obviously, this is how Ayn Rand had to get Objectivism. She didn't get it from reading *Atlas*, nor from attending my lectures. To her, it was like seeing the truck; it was the result of her perception of reality (obviously not on just one day). There's no substitute for this. Her summary in her works is the beginning of the quest—it's like a map, or a traffic guide, but that's all. You still have to travel the same route. Of course, the map makes it a lot easier. But you still have to take the journey.

There are many, many complexities involved in this journey. To give you just a sort of advanced, anticipated idea: How do you get philosophy from reality directly, without the intermediaries of other

people's lectures and books? Take one obvious difficulty: Philosophy, you know, is hierarchical; it's whole structure, with one idea resting on another and another, and so on. So most of it seemingly can be gotten from reality directly. You need to have a whole fund of philosophy already established to pave the way for whatever you're studying. So how do you grasp that whole fund to begin with, and then, how do you hold it in your mind to get to the next idea without having that fund of abstractions swamp you, overcome you, detach you from reality? That's a big problem. We need a method for condensing all of the background of a given issue into a simple unit that is still based on reality, so that you can hold it all easily, yet without drowning in ideas at the expense of reality. That's a technique that has to be learned.

Another example of the problem here: You have to concretize, but when, and how? Sometimes, concretization is just the wrong thing. If you overdo it, if you give too many concretes, what sets in? Who can guess? The crow epistemology. (I'm assuming you know that by the "crow epistemology" we mean you can hold only so many units in your mind at a given moment; the mind is limited in what it can absorb; if you give it too many units, it just goes blank and loses everything; that's what we're summarizing as crow epistemology.) You're trying to grasp something, and it's delicate and complicated—so if you give it too many concretes, you just obliterate your understanding. Of course if you give it too few, it's vague, it's empty, it's unreal. Well, how much is too much?

I've indicated, as another point, that you need to know when to rely on definitions and when to say "No, this is not the place for a definition." Another point: You need to know when to ignore polemics all criticism from other people, and just follow a progression in the privacy of your own mind; and, on the other hand, when it's important to turn around and play devil's advocate, when there is really something you have to face and answer.

It's a whole complex process, which Ayn Rand herself called "chewing"—on the obvious analogy. And the way she thought of it was like this: First you hear or think of an idea—that's like taking a bite of food into your mouth. But then comes the chewing, the breaking it down, the ripping it into its elements, establishing its reality tie in detail. And the result, of course, is digestion—you can assimilate it, your system can use it. That's the purpose of the first half of the course: It's the theory and practice of chewing ideas, and thereby making them digestible. Without this, your ideas will be generalized, unconvincing, and ultimately unimportant to you. With it, your ideas should be like "two and two is four" or "the sky is blue"—lucid, convincing, reality-based.

One reason that people don't know the method of chewing is that it's not taught. It needs to be discovered; it needs to be communicated as a separate skill. We're going to do something on that in lectures two to six.

I now want to go to the last major topic for this first lecture. There's a *second* reason that people do not know this skill of chewing or digesting ideas. There's a particular philosophic error, very widespread even among good, sincere Objectivists, a very widespread error that stops people from grasping the right method. And that is really the subject of the entire second half of this course, but I want to introduce it in a general overview now. And that error is the mind/body dichotomy.

In my opinion, this is actually the most important issue in philosophy. I don't know whether I'll stand by that in five years, but at the moment, it is certainly the most important issue in philosophy that I can see. And it's the real killer of good people, the thing that wrecks their mental processes.

Of course you know from lectures and books in general what this is about, and I'm not going to rehash it in much detail. This is the idea that there's a basic dichotomy running through human life affecting every vital area. Everything, in effect, is divisible into the mind (or the soul) versus the body; the spiritual versus the material or the physical, with the idea that you have to choose one or the other.

There are all sorts of variants. I once made a list of twenty-eight different variants, of which I'm

going to name a few, just to give you an idea of the tremendous scope of this: theory versus practice, love versus sex, the moral versus the practical, pure science versus applied science, reason versus emotions, art versus business, concepts versus percepts, rationalism versus empiricism, the analytic versus the synthetic, happiness versus pleasure, art versus entertainment.

I don't want to imply that any of these variants is unimportant—each of them is somewhat different from the next—but in my view, three of them stand out above all the rest. All the others are forms or derivatives, but there are three that I would single out as the real heart of this dichotomy of the mind versus the body. (I'm here focusing on how it would be a problem to Objectivists.) The moral versus the practical, reason versus emotion, concepts versus percepts. Let me elaborate those three.

I want to put each of them to you from one perspective, and I want you to see if you can identify a common denominator uniting all three (obviously something beyond the fact that they are all instances of the mind/body dichotomy. I'll give you the three in condensed form.

1. The moral versus the practical. This is basically the following problem: how to do right and succeed in the world as it actually is. The moral versus the practical is a problem of *action*; it's a problem of *what to do*. And as it stands in the mind of the person who holds to the dichotomy, there's a conflict. He feels, "I have my own standards in my own mind, but I'm confronted by an alien world that does not necessarily adapt to my standards, so that if I act on my standards, I'm going to be led to destruction or failure in the actual world; what should I do?" That is the problem of the moral versus the practical as it stands in the minds of good people.
2. Reason versus emotion. Here, the problem is how to follow reason while feeling. This is basically a problem not of action but of emotion or feeling. And here, the conflict in the person's mind is: "I want to follow reason; I want to be true to my own intellectual conclusions. But I'm confronted by an alien, nonrational thrusts from—" From what? He might say from his body, or if he's an Objectivist, he'll say from his subconscious. But it doesn't make any difference, because his subconscious in his mind, at this moment, amounts to his body, his brain, his automatized mechanism—something outside of his conscious mind now. He feels, "I get these feelings. Some of them don't conform to my thoughts. I want to follow reason, but I'm confronted by these alien thrusts—the emotion, some of them at least." What to do about them?
3. Concepts versus percepts. This is basically a problem not of action or of feeling but thinking—that is, how to think correctly, how to use your mind. And here the person has a conflict as follows: He wants to use concepts, he wants to think abstractly, he wants to connect ideas by the use of logic, but he finds himself confronted by sense data, facts, observations from reality that simply do not adhere to his conclusions, which contradict them, even though his reasoning in his own mind seems impeccable to him. What is the name for the type of person in philosophy who clings to concepts and says, in effect, "Facts may contradict my concepts, but if so, it's tough on the facts"? A "rationalist." Rationalism has dominated philosophy (at least the better philosophy) through the ages. Starting way back with Parmenides, who gave an argument as to why change is impossible, and then saw things change in front of his eyes, and said, "They're not really changing, because that simply does not agree with my unanswerable argument."

What is the common denominator in all three cases, the moral versus the practical, reason versus emotion, concepts versus percepts? In all three cases, it seems to the person that there is a conflict between the internal and the external, between the inner world and the outer. It's your own standards versus the uncontrolled world of other people, so therefore you can't be sure that your own standards will lead to success. Or, it's your standards versus uncontrolled responses thrust on you. Or, your standards, your inner proper method, versus uncontrolled facts that leap out at you and smash your

standards. So it seems to people as though the alternative is to have your own standards, remain in inner control of your life, by means of cutting off, minimizing, turning away from the external, or give in to the external, conform to it, and therefore abandon your own inner integrity and standards. That would mean: Have moral standards, give up the quest for practicality; have rational self-supervision, give up feeling; have logic and conceptual system in your thought, forget about facts; or take the other side—deal with practical situations (feelings, facts) as they come up, but do it without method, standards, or your own inner control.

This is a terrible dilemma if you have any part of it, a really terrible dilemma.

If the person chooses morality—chooses principles, ideals—he will come out a “tortured idealist.” On the other hand, the “body” side, if you make the choice of practicality over morality, what are you? A pragmatist. If you choose the mind side regarding feeling—you say, “I’m going to remain in control, I’m not having any truck with these things that are thrust on me that I can’t control”—what is a name for the “feeling” division under the “mind” side? A “repressor.” And if you choose the “body” side—you say, “The hell with logic and standards, I have feelings, and I’m going to act on them, and that’s it”—then you’re an “emotionalist”; that’s the best name for it. Regarding “thought,” if you’re on the “mind” side, and you cling to concepts at the price of facts, that, we’ve already said, is a rationalist. And there is the opposite in philosophy, too, under the “body” side—if you cling to facts and are scornful of concepts, that’s called empiricist.

Of these three dichotomies, all forms of the inner versus the outer, the one I regard as the most basic is rationalism versus empiricism. The others, to some extent, take care of themselves if we grasp that issue.

If you have any part of this problem, on either side of the dichotomy for any one of these divisions the chances are very strong that you have succumbed to rationalism or empiricism in some way. If I’ve learned anything about people or philosophy, it’s how fantastically widespread this dichotomy of rationalism versus empiricism is. It is applicable to much more than technical philosophers; it is very very common among Objectivists.

Objectivists tend, for obvious reasons, to the mind side. They’re staunch idealists, repressors, and rationalists, if they’re going to go for this dichotomy at all. There is an exception: There’s a certain type who’s on the other side. I really hesitate, but for what it’s worth, with tremendous qualifications and reservations, this is not a universal truth, simply a *tendency*. I have noticed a more pronounced inclination of Objectivist males to go for rationalism, and females to go for empiricism. Obviously this is not a sexual phenomenon—I have known rationalist women, and also women who don’t have either of these; and I’ve known empiricist men. But there is a certain reason—you might even guess because you see that rationalism is connected to repression, and you know that there’s sort of a culturally different expectation for women and men with regard to emotions.

I want to just conclude by tying these mind/body issues into the anti-philosophical arguments that we started with. There’s a one-to-one correlation between the three main dichotomies and the three main arguments, as follows:

Take the argument for the uselessness of philosophy in daily life. It rests on the idea of a disconnection between abstractions and concretes. It implies that abstractions are irrelevant to the reality that you live with and deal with. The idea of philosophy as a system of ideas without connection to daily life comes from rationalism. And this, I may say, is one reason why students have so much trouble digesting Objectivism: They try honestly to understand it, but they have unwittingly subconsciously absorbed a rationalist idea of thought, and that controls implicitly the function of their minds. It defines, without their even knowing, what constitutes understanding, logic, order, and so on. It warps their whole approach to philosophy, *unknown* to them. And so they struggle and struggle, and they can’t see why they never get the clarity they’re after. Thus, rationalism becomes a self-fulfilling



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