

# OH YEAH! WHY DOES A MAN WALK TO MEGARA?

By

Robert M. Dunn

Presented at the Philosophical Club of Cleveland: January 13<sup>th</sup>, 1997

## INTRODUCTION

Good evening ladies and gentlemen, members, associates and guests. For the benefit of the recording media let me say that tonight is January 13, 1998 and we are gathered in the faculty lounge of the Case Western Reserve Law School for the first regular meeting of the Philosophical Club of Cleveland in the 1998 calendar year. I am Bob Dunn and I will be the speaker this evening. The title of my talk is Oh Yeah! Why Does a Man Walk to Megara? Without more, lets be on with the show!

Humor: May I see the hands of all those who are present, awake, and can hear me?

If I may impose once more, will everyone please look first to the west wall where the sink and counter are, and then, upon my signal, to the east wall where the windows are located?

May I see the hand of anyone of you who is unaware of having raised your hand or of looking west or east?

May I see the hands of those who think this room is just anyplace anyone wants it to be?

May I see the hands of those who think this room is someplace in particular?

Is there anyone who did not do these things of his or her own free choice?

Well, that is reassuring. You have reaffirmed my belief in two basic axioms about which I will talk tonight, namely the axioms of existence and consciousness, or, phrased otherwise, this room exists and each of us is aware of it; more about that later.

Does everyone have a copy of the Definitions and Principles handout? Good. Tonight I am going to deal with a couple of philosophic concepts, Aristotle's "REAFFIRMATION THROUGH DENIAL" and Ayn Rand's "FALLACY OF THE STOLEN CONCEPT", however, as you will sense, while I regard these as important concepts, I think that the reasons WHY they are important is even more important than the specific concepts themselves. If the "why" is not realized, then the subject concepts will be useful only for games of philosophic trivia. I confess, I think it is more important than that.

In the principle of Reaffirmation through Denial, Aristotle points out that those who challenge and seek to deny the validity and efficacy of reason are doomed in the attempt because they have no choice but to employ in their own argument the very reason they seek to reject.

In the Fallacy of the Stolen Concept, Rand points to the error involved in seeking to deny the validity of some broader concept by employing another, narrower, concept which, but for the broader one, would not exist. And I promise to let you in on the secret of why a man walks to Megara.

## **BODY OF TALK**

Philosophy, as I understand it, is the science which studies the fundamental nature of existence. It is commonly divided into five branches. The first two branches, the most fundamental ones, are: first, metaphysics, which studies existence and the universe as a whole, in a word it is the "What Is," of philosophy, and second, epistemology, which studies the nature, acquisition and validation of knowledge, it is the "How do you know?" of philosophy. The other branches, ethics, esthetics, and politics are necessarily rooted in and derived from metaphysics and epistemology. Politics, including all forms of collective social arrangements, also entertains and integrates some concepts from ethics because human conduct, as dealt with in ethics, has substantial implications for the study of social organization, which is the essential subject of politics.

How many of you have studied some epistemology? As I see it, the epistemological question of "How do you know?" should be higher on our list of priorities than the metaphysical question of "What is the nature of existence?" Unless we have some grasp of the question of "How do you know?" we are not able to qualify any answer to any question as to the nature of existence. I realize that assuming THAT one knows the nature of reality, without having inquired as to HOW one knows, is far and away the prevailing approach, the commonly accepted pattern in our culture, but, as will become clearer as we go along, I think that this backward approach may be at the root of all the more serious human problems, whether individual or social.

If and to the extent we are unable to validate whatever we hold as knowledge, then to that extent, we are at best at the mercy of the laws of chance and, at worst, subject to making choices which are calculated, even though unknown to us, to subject us to serious adversity, including of course the loss of life itself. With respect to the social and political perspective, philosopher David Kelly has said that the first step in the loss of human liberty is the failure or refusal of people, of a given society, to grasp and implement reason as a cultural norm and as the basic source of knowledge; he says that the loss of liberty in all declining civilizations has been preceded by the rejection of their earlier reliance upon reason. That is pretty strong medicine. I have not done the research to validate or deny Dr. Kelly's view, but, frankly, based upon my years of exposure to, and other study of, the human race, I strongly suspect that he is right. There is certainly no question in my mind, that epistemology is the most important field of philosophy from the point of view of the effect upon human life. Our epistemology determines how we think about the world and ourselves. This outlook guides our selection of values, and our values in turn control the myriad of choices we make on an ongoing basis. And, of course, it is those choices which are the most significant factor in determining the course of our lives. Yes, whether one is aware of it or not, epistemology is, in

my considered opinion, far and away the single most important controllable factor in human life. (Ayn Rand has observed that consciousness is the most abused and neglected faculty.)

Some years ago I was privileged, along with two other people, to have an hour of essentially private tutoring, at The Foundation for Economic Education, by Professor Ludwig Von Mises, the renown Austrian free-market economist. As we took our seats around a coffee table, Professor Von Mises assumed an informal air and said, "They asked me to talk to you about gold. Where shall I start? Well, everything is connected to everything else so it really doesn't matter where I start, we'll come back to the beginning anyway". Well, philosophy is, of course, much like gold in that respect. Every aspect of the subject is ultimately tied to every other aspect. However, we have not allotted sufficient time to cover all of philosophy in our session this evening so I shall need to confine myself to a few elementary, fundamental points and hope that I can do reasonable justice to them.

Tonight I hope to cover only about one semester's work so I am sure this audience will have no trouble picking up on it, controversial though some of it may be, in the 80 to 90 or so minutes that we have.

However, that is not to say that I think members of the audience are likely to learn anything that will change their minds about anything. As that inimitable sage, Benjamin Franklin, so wisely observed, " A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still." Accordingly, regardless of what I say, I presume that you will most likely leave this forum with the comfort of your presently held views firmly in place, without respect to whether they conform to any views which I may present.

Is there anyone who does not have the Definitions and Principles handout?

My talk this evening will deal with some of the principles which are involved in our thinking processes. My interest in this subject has some deep roots. When, as an undergraduate, I was living and playing cards at the fraternity house, I observed that after each hand, most of the other card players recalled and remarked in excruciating detail the specific cards and sequences just played and speculated as to a myriad of 'what ifs.' As for myself, I did not and I do not have a good capacity for recalling and recounting such minutiae. On the other hand, I have found that when I have an organized set of principles on some matter, then I can readily put related concrete facts into place in relation to the principle, and to my other factual knowledge. Observing this, I became, and remain, vitally interested in principles, broad propositions which cover and explain the endless myriad of concretes with which we are continually presented and have to deal. Coming later to understand that the faculty of reason is the human's basic tool of survival, I became interested in the nature of that faculty and what it takes to operate it to best advantage.

So far as I am aware, the human exhibits mental--i.e., intellectual-- faculties far superior to any other known life form. This is not to demean other species nor is it a claim to know all about the mental faculties of non-humans, but it is an attempt to recognize and acknowledge what to my mind are those most remarkable capacities of the human. As examples we need only look around us in this room and appreciate the intellectual wonder of the implications of what is immediately before our eyes, things that we usually take for granted. Think of the human magic displayed in the electric lamps that bring light to this otherwise natural darkness. Imagine for a moment the

enormous amount of knowledge and ingenuity required to manufacture, deliver, and install the furniture, the plumbing, the dinner, and, perhaps most of all, the books before us. Leonard Read, founder and former chairman of the Foundation for Economic Education, after appropriate research, wrote an essay which pointed out that, simple as it may appear, there is no human being, dead or alive, who knew or knows how to make a pencil. Pencils are made only with the combined knowledge and effort of many people. I expect the same may be said of the things we see here; things which evidence not only wonderful ingenuity but also substantial interdependence and a high level of cooperation. The books here are remarkable not only for the magic of their physical construction, but even more so for the myriad of ideas and reasoning stored in them and readily accessible for our review to relieve us from 'reinventing the wheel,' and to provide guidance in our analysis of our current problems.

Think of the nature and purpose of our coming together here with an organized regularity for the purpose of entertaining and exploring abstract ideas. Surely it behooves us to be explicitly aware and appreciative of the wonderful capacities of human beings. The basic nature and capacity of humans I accept as a given, as an aspect of nature, a fact of life, the same as I accept the existence of rocks and gravity and the weather. Of course, I do not claim to fully understand any of these things, but I do acknowledge their existence. In addition, although I am a devout atheist, I do routinely engage in thanksgiving. However, rather than thanking some supposed supernatural power, I thank the other humans, past and present, and only some very few of whom are personally known to me, for the inestimable wealth of things and ideas and relationships which have been made accessible to me, and which I could never have provided for myself if left solely to my own devices. For example, I did not discover or invent the basic ideas which I am presenting to you this evening, so although I am responsible for my acceptance of them, and for the manner of my presentation, still I must give credit and thanks to those who went before, for their originations. Sometimes I find it helpful to recall that the human race existed, apparently with substantially the same mental apparatus, for several million years, gradually accumulating minute bits of essentially concrete facts, before the Greeks made the quantum intellectual leap into philosophy and introduced the race to explicitly held abstractions. Certainly I thank them. [Just as an aside, when I get on my motorcycle and head off for a day on the open road, I invariably recite a silent 'thank you' to all those who created and made available to me the wonderful bike path, the highway, which makes my trip so fast, so smooth, so safe, and so wonderfully enjoyable. Understand that if I had the choice I would have government sell the roads to the highest bidders, so I'm not thanking government per se, but I still thank the people who made the roads.]

But despite all the wonderful human capacities and accomplishments, our race still suffers the most egregious calamities. The observance of 'man's inhumanity to man' is legendary. What is going on here? Why does such a talented creature create and tolerate such hell on earth? With so much capacity, should we really be fouling our own nest? Why does the human race keep shooting itself in the foot? The details of the 'why' are surely more complex and elusive than our time tonight will allow, but at least I think we can profitably appeal to a search for some principles which may be useful in enhancing our understanding of the ongoing human dilemma. My thesis is essentially simple: Reason, the faculty which identifies and integrates the material provided by the senses, is the human's basic tool of survival. Reason is our only valid and reliable means to knowledge, of ourselves and the world around us, and that knowledge is our best basis for choosing among the ongoing stream of alternatives which, for the most part, determine the course of our lives. Correct

thinking is therefore at a premium. BUT, there is NO THINKING INSTINCT. Contrary to the common implicitly held, but unexamined view, CORRECT THINKING MUST BE LEARNED. Assuming, as is commonplace, that if I can speak then it follows that I can think straight is patently untenable.

Speaking of assuming, you are perhaps familiar, but I suppose a momentary reminder will not be out of place, with the graphic description of the effect of assuming. As the admonition goes, one should respect the profound implications of the spelling of the word as to assume makes an ASS of U and ME.

The myriad fallacies threatening clear thinking are the subject of massive tomes on the subject, but, despite all the materials available in our much touted "Information Age," our culture proceeds, in large measure, on the premise that thinking is automatic. A course in thinking is not to my knowledge required to graduate from any institution in America, on any subject, with the possible exception of a Ph.D. in Philosophy. Clever evasion is not a substitute for clear thinking and the search for immediate gratification is not calculated to achieve life long happiness or contribute to the achievement of a civilized society. Accordingly, humans need to understand the nature of the thinking process, its appropriate procedures and potential pitfalls, and then employ straight thinking as their basic guide in choosing the actions they will take. But, to begin, it must be realized that THINKING MUST BE CORRECTLY LEARNED.

Obviously this is an enormous subject. Tonight I shall talk about a couple of little known elements of clear thinking. First, Aristotle's principle of REAFFIRMATION THROUGH DENIAL, which occurs when one attempts to deny the validity of a concept but is forced to use the same concept to make or sustain the attempt. For example, it defeats those who would deny the validity of reason as they have no choice but to use reason in the failing attempt to make their argument. Second, Ayn Rand's FALLACY OF THE STOLEN CONCEPT, which consists of using a concept while denying the validity of its genetic roots, i.e., of an earlier concept upon which it depends. For example, it is sometimes argued that there are no entities, that nothing exists but motion, ignoring the fact that motion presupposes the thing, the entity, which moves, and that without the concept of entity there can be no such concept as motion.

It has been said, and I agree, that if the human really understands the full implications and effects of misbehavior, then evil acts will not be committed. Ignorance, not money as some have said, is the root of all evil. More specifically ignorance of the powers, the limitations and the correct procedures for valid thinking are that root. It is not that the robber is unaware of the risk of being found guilty and punished by the courts and society for his or her crime, no, the real problem is that the robber is not truly aware of the effect the evil act will have upon his or her own self-evaluation. Few people, so far as I am aware, go about with an explicit conscious concern for their own self-esteem as an ever present element in their choices of actions. True, a substantial number of people avoid evil actions out of fear of the sanctions which may be imposed by their peers, their religion or society, but too many choose their actions by what they judge they can hide from others. Far too few realize or consider that the more fundamental issue is the effect that the evil act will have on their own evaluation of themselves and of its fundamental threat to their own happiness and well being.

But why does this condition exist and persist? I am sure different people will give answers as varied as religion, cultural conditions, politics, economics, global warming, you name it; but what will be at the root of all of them? I suggest to you that it is human nature. Human nature, in the sense that the human has a particular form of consciousness, namely that it is conceptual and volitional, and, in addition, the human has few if any instincts.

Objectivism, the philosophy adopted by Ayn Rand, holds that the human consciousness is conceptual, that it is rooted in the fact that while humans automatically experiences sensations such as light and pain, and perceptions such as specific individual buildings, people, cars, mountains, et cetera, they hold their knowledge in the form of concepts, abstractions. The sensations are transient and expire as they are experienced. A perception, on the other hand, consists of some pattern of sensations and is retained in the mind, and is recallable, in the form of a mental unit--a particular single thing. Upon subsequent experience of the same or an essentially similar unit of perception the human mind can recognize that this unit is a member of the group earlier identified in previous percepts. If the percept has been given a name, say "building," then it has been conceptualized and one can recognize the individual building as being a member of the class of things defined as buildings. The human can think about the class of things called 'buildings', and, in a given case, depending upon the extent of his or her specific knowledge, can be aware, often in an instant, of its usefulness as a shelter, what materials are needed to construct or repair it, its status as a work of art, its economic utility, et cetera, et cetera.

The net result is that, for the human, the basic tool of survival is his mind, his consciousness, his mental apparatus, in a word his faculty of reason. Unable to rely upon instincts, the human can survive only through an ongoing chain of choices. To make a choice requires one to have ~ basis. The basis for choice may be carefully thought out or mere caprice, but regardless of how worthy or frivolous, still there is some basis for each choice. The better the basis conforms to reality, the better the choice will be, i.e., the more likely it is that the choice will achieve a desirable result.

How are we to know what thought process is best calculated to provide us with the most accurate conclusions in the light of our present knowledge? What do we have to work with? How can we go about validating whatever tentative conclusions we may reach?

Consider this: Our five senses are our only validatable sources of information. Consciousness consists either of being aware of the data being supplied by senses, or of our contemplation of materials, or of ideas previously generated from sense data. An emotion is an instantaneous automatic response to some fact of reality reflecting an estimate dictated by one's own standards, which in turn were generated by prior sensory experience and the reasoning, valid or faulty, by which it was evaluated. As such, the guidance of an emotion will simply reflect the quality of our prior evaluation(s) of sense data, but is never itself the fundamental source of knowledge which may be used to guide choices. Revelation, so called, is another alleged guide to action, but, again, it is not itself a validatable guide. While some people claim direct contact with God or some other mysterious power, the rest of us, for the most part and despite serious concern and effort, have never experienced anything to even suggest there is anything in their reports other than chicanery, coincidence, or fear of the unknown. The unvalidatable reports of unrepeatable experiences by which some seek to qualify their beliefs or stories cannot reasonably be accepted as

evidence. There is certainly no reasonable objection to holding unvalidated experiences in the form of questions. But, at this time, for verifiable knowledge, we are left with our five senses feeding data to our faculty of reason. If properly trained and exercised, our reason faculty will operate as a logic machine to make non-contradictory identifications, and it will integrate the materials provided by the senses, along with their appropriate conclusions, into our existing reservoir of knowledge.

But why are we to think that we can rely upon our senses? It is well known that if we place a straight stick into water it will appear bent. Likewise, if we look at a coin held at an angle to the horizontal, we see an ellipse, but if we see the same coin at a right angle to the horizontal we see a circle. Now is that coin a circle or an ellipse or both? Tell the truth now. How do you know? Who says that the coin is just one shape and not two or more? Aristotle said that A is A, that the thing is itself and whatever it is, it is, and nothing else. Others say we cannot know the true nature of the coin, that the most we can know is our own sense impressions of the coin and not the coin itself.

Well, our means for validating our thought processes and the reliability of the data provided by our senses can be approached either from the top, so to speak, or the bottom. We can go forward or backward. That is, we can take the issue in question, define the terms, and go backward down the ladder of knowledge until we reach the foundation, the root of our theory, and demonstrate why our foundation is reliable and is calculated to sustain our tree of knowledge. Or, we can go the other way. We can name our foundation, demonstrate its validity and then proceed to construct our tree of knowledge, reaching for the point where we might otherwise have started our inquiry. Tonight I will use the latter approach and create a hierarchy of knowledge based upon the teachings of Aristotle and Rand. Aristotle, in my view, is truly the father of explicitly identifiable and credible human thought processes. He is the father of LOGIC, and latter day developments such as "Fuzzy Logic" are little more than misguided juvenile graffiti paint-bombed onto the eternal monument constructed by Aristotle. He identified and elaborated on the distinction between genus and specie, and he laid the philosophical foundation for science. Today I want to specifically note his contribution of the three basic laws of thought, namely:

- (1) The Law of Identity; symbolized as A is A.
- (2) The Law of Contradiction, or if you prefer The Law of Non-Contradiction; symbolized as A cannot be X and Non-X at the same time and in the same respect.

And finally,

- (3) The Law of Excluded Middle; symbolized as A cannot be X and not be X.

Aristotle went to some length in his volume titled Metaphysics to point out that those who attempt to deny the law of non-contradiction (A cannot be X and Non-X) and claim that a thing can both be X and not be X at the same time, are at least asserting that the words "be" and "not be" have specific and different meanings, and it follows then that not everything will be both 'so and not so' at the same time. Furthermore, he argues, if X has multiple meanings then it can be understood if each meaning is represented by a different word, however, if only one word is used

**(QUOTE)**

"but one were to say that the word has an infinite number of meanings, obviously reasoning would be impossible; for not to have one meaning is to have no

meaning, and if words have no meaning our reasoning with one another, and indeed with ourselves, has been annihilated; for it is impossible to think of anything if we do not think of one thing.... For why does a man walk to Megara and not stay at home, when he thinks he ought to be walking there? Why does he not walk early some morning into a well or over a precipice, if one happens to be in his way? Why do we observe him guarding against this, evidently because he does not think that falling in is alike good and not good? Evidently, then, he judges one thing to be better and another worse. And if this is so, he must also judge one thing to be a man and another to be not-a-man, one thing to be sweet and another to be not-sweet Therefore, as it seems, all men make unqualified judgments, if not about all things, still about what is better and worse. And if this is not knowledge but opinion, they should be all the more anxious about the truth, as a sick man should be more anxious about his health than one who is healthy; for he who has opinions is, in comparison with the man who knows, is not in a healthy state as for as the truth is concerned."

(UNQUOTE)

Accordingly, by attempting to deny the Law of Contradiction, the challenger has reaffirmed it. Upon acknowledgement that the words "be" and "not be" have specific and separate meanings, it becomes apparent that if it were otherwise, any argument would be impossible. This of course includes the argument that both terms are in effect the same. Wherefore the attempt to deny the Law of Contradiction is defeated and thus the name for the principle, "Reaffirmation through Denial."

While accepting and reaffirming Aristotle's basic laws, Ayn Rand offers her own unique way of laying a foundation for an epistemology of Reason. She offers that the ultimate rational basis for all our knowledge is in three axioms. They are EXISTENCE, IDENTITY (which is a corollary of Existence), and CONSCIOUSNESS.

Now let me give you a four paragraph quote from Rand which will surely express the matter better than any paraphrase which I may devise.

(QUOTE)

Existence exists--and the act of grasping that statement implies two corollary axioms: that something exists which one perceives and that one exists possessing consciousness, consciousness being the faculty of perceiving that which exists.

If nothing exists, there can be no consciousness: a consciousness with nothing to be conscious of is a contradiction in terms: before it could identify itself as consciousness, it had to be conscious of something. If that which you claim to perceive does not exist, what you possess is not consciousness.

Whatever the degree of your knowledge, these two--existence and consciousness--are axioms you cannot escape, these two are the irreducible primaries implied in any action you undertake, in any part of your knowledge and in its sum, from the first ray of light you perceive at the start of your life to the widest erudition you might acquire at its end. Whether you know the shape of a



pebble or the structure of a solar system, the axioms remain the same: that it exists and that you know it.

To exist is to be something, as distinguished from the nothing of non-existence, it is to be an entity of a specific nature made of specific attributes. Centuries ago, the man who was--no matter what his errors--the greatest of your philosophers, has stated the formula defining the concept of existence and the rule of all knowledge: A is A. A thing is itself.... I am here to complete it: Existence is Identity, Consciousness is Identification.

(UNQUOTE) [GS,FNI 152;pb 124]

Like Aristotle's laws, Rand's axioms are not susceptible of proof per se. Proof being a process of establishing the validity of a proposition by deriving a conclusion, step by step, from the evidence of the senses. Appeal en-route may be made to prior conclusions, but to complete the process each conclusion must be ultimately validated by chasing it back to its root in sense perception. Along the way, each step must be taken in accord with the laws of logic. Without the benefit of axioms, which neither require nor are susceptible of proof, this would be a process of infinite regress.

Axioms are self-evident truths, the validity of which are demonstrated, first by their self-evidence, and, in the event of challenge, as Aristotle taught us, by reaffirmation through denial. Self-evident simply means direct-perception or direct-awareness at the perceptual level, the level of consciousness characterized by an awareness of entities--things--units. Each percept is made up of a pattern of sensations which form an entity--some thing--but sensations themselves are not retained. Awareness at the perceptual level is automatic and is the level of consciousness which, as I understand, is most characteristic of the non-human animals. Each percept is retained and is the material which, for humans, becomes a concept when it is defined and given a name, i.e. when we create a definition and a word for it. Definitions are properly characterized by first naming the genus, or class to which the subject belongs and then differentiating it from the other members of the class; e.g., the classic definition of man as the rational animal. Animal here is the genus to which man belongs and rational differentiates man from the other members of the class. (Now I am really just illustrating the nature of definition and I am not saying anything about the mental faculties of other animals--the reason is simple--I am very aware that I know little if anything about the faculties of other species.)

As you can see, this process of defining things by genus and differentiae, results in the creation of what is called a hierarchy of knowledge, a structure that may be diagramed in the form of a tree, thus the metaphor, "tree of knowledge." (Again, thank Mr. Aristotle; it was he who explicitly identified the distinction and relation between genus and specie.)

It follows then that when we chase any concept down the tree of knowledge we are going to ultimately get to the root. The roots are Existence and Consciousness. From that point there is nowhere else to go. That is the end of the line. Existence and Consciousness can not be defined because they are not members of any wider class. On the contrary, they are themselves the broadest of all concepts--Self-Evident, Axiomatic Concepts--and they are demonstrated by the fact that they are inescapable and any attempt to prove anything else is ultimately dependent upon them. They

must be used in any attempt to deny them and thus, again, we have the exercise of 'Reaffirmation through Denial.'

The 'Fallacy of the Stolen Concept' was identified by Ayn Rand. It is the second of the principles along this line that are our subject tonight. It "is (defined as) the fallacy of using a concept while denying the validity of its genetic roots, i.e., of an earlier concept(s) on which it logically depends." [Leonard Peikoff, footnote, "Philosophical Detection,"PWNI, 26; pb22.] Here are a few examples:

- \*\*\* The claim that there are no entities, that only motion exists, ignoring or avoiding the fact that there can be no motion without an entity which moves and that without the concept of entity there can be no such concept as motion.
- \* \* \* The claim that there is no law of identity, that only change exists, ignoring or avoiding the fact that there can be no change without something which changes and that without the law of identity no such concept as change is possible.
- \*\*\* Descarte's argument that since humans are known to have made mistakes it is not possible to know what is right. This of course ignores or overlooks the fact that the concept of wrong could have only come into existence after, and is dependent upon the preexistence of, the concept of right. If truth were really unknowable, the idea of error would be meaningless.
- \* \* \* Likewise the concept of insane must be derived from sane, invalid from valid, dreaming from awake, non-X from X.
- \* \* \* Any use of complex derivative concepts as alleged axioms while avoiding or ignoring that their statements imply and depend upon the concepts of "existence," "consciousness," and "identity," which they propose to negate.
- \*\*\* Any and all attempts to negate reason by means of reasoned argument.

### SUMMARY OF THESIS

To sum up, as we have seen, Aristotle's principle of **REAFFIRMATION THROUGH DENIAL**, and Rand's principle of the **FALLACY OF THE STOLEN CONCEPT** are basic methods for dealing with challenges to the validity and efficacy of the epistemology of reason. A man walks to Megara because, in the light of what he has experienced, he thinks that it will be better in the circumstances if he does so. He does not think "better" and "not better" mean the same thing nor does he think that "walking" and "not walking" are either the same thing or that they will have the same result.

Further we have covered that due to the nature of human consciousness; it is the mind, the rational faculty, which is the human's basic tool of survival. Both sheer survival and the quality of life are determined, to the extent that they are within human control, by one's choices of values and actions. Those choices will depend in turn upon the amount and quality of the thinking that the individual has done. Epistemological principles, known or unknown, acknowledged or ignored, are facts which are beyond human control. Wishing will not make it so. And, to the extent one employs correct principles and makes choices in accord with the nature of reality the best available results will be obtained. Accordingly, you ignore the principles of rational epistemology at your peril.

Unlike the other animals which adapt themselves, as best they can, to the world in which they find themselves, the human has the capacity, and in fact generally does, alter and adapt the world, within the limits of its nature, to himself. Successful adaptation takes place to the extent that the true nature of reality, whether known or unknown, is employed. 'Nature,' as Bacon admonished us, 'to be commanded must be obeyed.' Like the laws of physics, the laws of epistemology are also laws of nature. They can, and should be, reduced to essentially simple forms and offered to those who wish and elect to take advantage of the opportunity to experience life to its fullest potential.

### CONCLUSION

To conclude: The problems of life and the world are not simple, but a reasoned approach to solutions is simple in principle. To be successful, individually or in groups, humans must identify and accept the relevant facts of reality and choose courses of action based upon those facts. To realize a successful life, the human must recognize that actions, including those taken for instant gratification, have long term consequences. The human needs to recognize the spiritual nature of his being and to appreciate that even crimes which appear undiscovered and ostensibly unpunished, nevertheless erode one's own soul, and, without a clear consciousness one has destroyed one's own self-esteem, regardless of how one is viewed by others; and if one loses his basic self-esteem, then he has lost the most essential element of truly successful human life.

The ideas which I have presented to you tonight have been in the process of accumulation over many years, and, are some of those upon which I rely to guide my own life. Like you, I do tend to be enamored of my opinions, however, long ago, I realized that I was neither omniscient nor infallible, so I explicitly adopted a personal policy of wanting to know the truth about anything and everything about which, and to the extent which, I have a reasonable concern. As much it would please me to be able to do so, I have found no good reason to change my mind about my lack of omniscience and infallibility, but I certainly have found the policy of "wanting to know" to be most productive. As you who function as managers know, subordinates much prefer to tell the boss what they think he or she wants to hear, never mind the truth. They often would let that truth come from some other source, but, of course, its the truth that you need, far more than misguided submission or superficial flattery. Accordingly, tonight I wish to assure you that even if at times I sounded like I was advocating some idea or another, the truth is that I am really more interested in learning than in teaching, and if you will offer me any insights or outlooks which are either enhancements or valid contradictions of some view( s ) I have expressed, I will sincerely thank you for it.

Now, let us windup this part of the presentation with a closing recitation of "The Man in The Glass," a poem that I think gets to the real bottom line. Ladies, I ask your indulgence with the

fact that the poem's phraseology is not currently PC, and I invite you, along with the gentlemen, to entertain the principle involved without regard to the nominal gender references. Following the reading we will then be on to the questions and comments.

### **THE MAN IN THE GLASS**

When you get what you want in your struggle for self  
And the world makes you king for a day  
Just go to a mirror and look at yourself  
And see what that man has to say.

For it isn't your father or mother or wife  
Who judgment upon you must pass  
The fellow whose verdict counts most in your life  
Is the one staring back from the glass.

Some people may think you a straight-shootin chum  
And call you a wonderful guy  
But the man in the glass says you're only a bum  
If you can't look him straight in the eye.

He's the fellow to please, never mind all the rest  
For he's with you clear up to the end  
And you've passed your most dangerous, difficult test  
If the man in the glass is your friend.

You may fool the whole world down the pathway of years  
And get pats on the back as you pass  
But your final reward will be heartaches and tears  
If you've cheated the man in the glass.

## **DEFINITIONS AND PRINCIPLES**

**AXIOM:** A statement that identifies the base of knowledge and of any further statement pertaining to that knowledge, a statement necessarily contained in all others, whether any particular speaker chooses to identify it or not. An axiom is a proposition that defeats its opponents by the fact that they have to accept it and use in the process of any attempt to deny it. [GS, FNI, 193; pb 155; ARL 45)

**AXIOMATIC CONCEPT:** is the identification of a primary fact of reality, which cannot be analyzed, i.e., reduced to other facts or broken into component parts. It is implicit in all knowledge. It is fundamentally given and directly perceived or experienced, which requires no proof or explanation, but on which all proofs and explanations rest. The first and primary axiomatic concepts are "existence," "identity" (which is a corollary of "existence") and "consciousness." One can study what exists and how consciousness functions; but one cannot analyze (or "prove") existence as such. These are irreducible primaries. (An attempt to "prove" them is self-contradictory: it is an attempt to "prove" existence by means of non-existence, and consciousness by means of unconsciousness.) [ITOE, 73; ARL, 43]

**CERTAINTY:** is the condition in which, in a given context of knowledge, the evidence for a given proposition is conclusive, i.e., all the evidence supports the said proposition and there is no evidence to support any alternative.

**CONCEPT:** is a mental integration of two or more units which are isolated according to a specific characteristic(s) and united by a specific definition. [ITOE 15.] Or: a mental integration of two or more units possessing the same distinguishing characteristic(s), with their particular measurements omitted. Concepts represent classifications of observed existents according to their relationships to other observed existents. [ITOE, 131.]

**CONCEPTUAL COMMON DENOMINATOR:** A commensurable characteristic (such as shape in the case of tables, or hue in the case of colors) is an essential element in the process of concept formation. I shall designate it as the "Conceptual Common Denominator" and define it as "The characteristic(s) reducible to a unit of measurement, by means of which man differentiates two or more existents from other existents possessing it." The distinguishing characteristic(s) of a concept represents a specified category of measurements within the "Conceptual Common Denominator" involved. [ITOE, 18.]

**CONSCIOUSNESS:** is the faculty of awareness--the faculty of perceiving that which exists. Awareness is not a passive state, but an active process. On the lower levels of awareness, a complex neurological process is required to enable man to experience a sensation and to integrate sensations into percepts; that process is automatic and non-volitional: man is aware of its results, but not of the process itself. On the higher conceptual level, the process is psychological, conscious and volitional. In either case, awareness is achieved and maintained by continuous action. [ITOE, 37.]

**EMOTION:** is (an instantaneous, automatic) response to a fact of reality, an estimate dictated by your standards. [GS, FNI, 182; pb 147.]

EPISTEMOLOGY: is a science devoted to the discovery of the proper methods of acquiring and validating knowledge. [ITOE, 47.]

ESTHETICS: is that branch of philosophy based on metaphysics, epistemology and ethics which is the study of art. ["Philosophy: Who Needs It,"PWNI, 4; PB4.]

EXISTENCE: A is A. A thing is itself. Existence is Identity. To exist is to be something [ a thing, an attribute or an action] as distinguished from the nothing of non-existence, it is to be an entity of a specific nature made of specific attributes.

IDENTIFICATION: is awareness of the existence of an entity, a process, a relationship. ...Existence is Identity, Consciousness is Identification. [GS,FNI,152;pbI25] See IDENTITY.

IDENTITY: is the condition or fact of being, of existence. Whatever exists is what it is. A is A.

The concept of "identity" does not indicate the particular natures of the existents it subsumes; it merely underscores the primary fact that they are what they are. [ITOE, 78]

A characteristic is an aspect of an existent. It is not a disembodied, Platonic universal. Just as a concept cannot mean existents apart from their identity, so it cannot mean identities apart from that which exists. Existence is Identity. (Consciousness is Identification.) [ITOE, 143] See IDENTIFICATION.

KNOWLEDGE is ...a mental grasp of a fact(s) of reality, reached either by perceptual observation or by a process of reason based on perceptual observation. [ITOE, 45; ARL 244.]

LANGUAGE: is a code of visual-auditory symbols that serves the psycho-epistemological function of converting concepts into the mental equivalents of concretes. Language is the exclusive domain and tool of concepts. Every word we use (with the exception of proper names) is a symbol that denotes a concept, i.e., that stands for an unlimited number of concretes of a certain kind. [ITOE, 11.]

LAW OF CONTRADICTION: A cannot both be B and not be B. A thing cannot both be and not be anything in particular. Contradictory propositions cannot both be true. A thing cannot be A and Non A at the same time and in the same respect. (See "NON-CONTRADICTION")

LAW OF EXCLUDED MIDDLE: A either is or is not B. A thing either is or is not anything in particular. Contradictory propositions cannot both be false.

LAW OF IDENTITY: A is A. Whatever is, is. A thing is what it is.

LOGIC: is the art or skill of non-contradictory identification. Logic has a single law, the Law of Identity, and its various corollaries. [PWNI, 17; PB15]

NON-CONTRADICTION: These truths hold good for everything that is, and not for some special genus apart from others. And all men use them, because they are true of being qua being.... For a principle which everyone must have who understands anything that is, is not a hypothesis.... Evidently then such a principle is the most certain of all; which principle this is, let us proceed to

say. It is, that the same attribute cannot at the same time belong and not belong to the same subject and in the same respect. [Aristotle, *MetaPhysics*, IV,3(W. D. Ross, trans.).] (See "LAW OF CONTRADICTION.)

NOTHING: is the absence of something.

PERCEPTION: is a group of sensations automatically retained and integrated by the brain of a living organism, which gives it the ability to be aware, not of single stimuli, but of entities, of things. ["*The Objectivist Ethics*," VOS, 10; pb90.] Perception is the awareness of entities. Unlike a fleeting sensation, perception is the discrimination of an object as a unitary whole, having a specific identity and enduring over time. [Kelly, *Foundations of Knowledge, Primacy of Existence*, #2.]

PHILOSOPHY: is the science that studies the fundamental aspects of the nature of existence to provide man with a comprehensive view of life as a frame of reference, for all his actions, mental or physical, psychological or existential. ["*The Chickens' Homecoming*," NL, 107.] See RELIGION.

OSTENSIVE DEFINITION: is the defining of conceptualized sensations (e.g. a color) and axiomatic concepts (e.g. existence) by pointing to that which is to be defined and saying in effect, I mean this.

REASON: is the faculty which identifies and integrates the material provided by the senses.

RELIGION: is the human's attempt to live in the light of what he/she holds to be ultimately true and good. [Brand Blanchard, *REASON AND BELIEF*, ...] ...remember that religion is an early form of philosophy, that the first attempts to explain the universe, to give a coherent frame of reference to man's life and a code of moral values was made by religion ["*Playboy's Interview with Ayn Rand*," pamphlet, 10.] ...religion is a primitive form of philosophy—an attempt to offer a comprehensive view of reality ["*Philosophy and Sense of Life*," RM, 31; pb25]

SELF-ESTEEM: is reliance on one's power to think. ["*The Age of Envy*," NL, 181.] (It is one's inviolate certainty that his mind is competent to think and his person is worthy of happiness, which means: is worthy of living. [GS, FNI, 156;pb 128.] No value is higher than self-esteem. [Ibid.,220;pb 175]

SELF-EVIDENT: Nothing is self-evident except the material of sensory perception. ["*Philosophical Detection*," PWMI, 15pb 13.] When we speak of "direct perception" or "direct awareness," we mean the perceptual level. Percepts, not sensations, are the given, the self-evident. The knowledge of sensations as components of percepts is not direct; it is acquired by man much later: it is a scientific, conceptual discovery. [ITOE, 5.]

SENSATION: is the automatic response of a sense organ to a stimulus from the outside world. ["*The Objectivist Ethics*," VOS, 9; pb 18. ARL, 452]

SOMETHING: is a particular thing indefinitely conceived or stated. [F&WCSD '43, 1078]

UNIT: is any aspect of reality: entities, attributes, actions, qualities, relationships, etc.; they may be perceptual concretes or other, earlier formed concepts. [ITOE,15.]

VOLITIONAL: means selected from two or more alternatives that were possible under the circumstances, the difference being made by the individual's decision, which could have been otherwise. [L. Peikoff, "The Philosophy of Objectivism" lecture series (1976), Lecture 3.]

Axioms:	Existence exists A is A Consciousness exists
Corollaries:	Existence is Identity Consciousness is Identification
Laws:	Identity Non-Contradiction Excluded Middle
Principle of:	Primacy of Existence vs. Primacy of Consciousness Uniformity of nature Causality; cause and effect Hierarchy of knowledge Reaffirmation through denial Fallacy of the Stolen Concept