Charcon 2018 – Applied Epistemology – Talking Points
Divine inspiration – Subjective – Pragmatic – Innate – Denial

Mixed Epistemologies

From a myriad of sources – parents, teachers, people around us

Result – five irrational epistemologies

      not just mixed premises   – **mixed-up, unstructured mental framework**
      more basic than premises – taken as the norm

      no pathway to applying epistemology – nonsensical, meaningless exercise

Given this as a foundation, it is easy to understand what formed the basis for the non-rational theorizing about epistemology. What consistency can be applied to analysis and methods when innumerable subconscious voices offer innumerable different pieces of advice?

How can we hope to learn from history with such an unprincipled mess?

And yet –

"We train in school. We train in college. We train on our jobs. We train at sports. We train at all the things we do with our minds." <u>This</u> training works.

Something is there; we simply do not know where to connect it to the traditional fundamentals

How could we? The fundamentals are all false. There is no connection from them to specific training

But –

- There is an implicit epistemology behind each thing that each person thinks, says, and does.
- There is an assumed epistemology behind science, technology, and every other piece of knowledge (right or wrong) in humanity's total repertoire.

We Need a Rational Epistemology

Just one – Objectivist Epistemology; ITOE

But with that, if you fail to choose <u>and</u> consequently <u>self-train</u>, then you unwittingly absorb a disorganized hodgepodge from the people around you.

Applied Epistemology?

Peikoff's quote – "Why is there no epistemological guidance for analysis?"

Objectivists miss that applying epistemology is more than just reading and even understanding ITOE.

There is still work <u>you</u> must do – the details, and training your mind through automatizing. How do we get from ITOE to the concrete details of our daily lives?

Failing that, you are just dogmatically applying Objectivist ideas – the dogmatic rationalist.

If ITOE is really right, then using those ideas should improve how your mind works.

But you have to train your mind

Thinking to make thinking work better.

That connection is what we will introduce with this discussion.

We will use various re-phrased definitions to emphasize the linkages and means of thinking.

These are not corrections of Ayn Rand.

We are not discussing philosophy, nor introducing philosophical terms.

This discussion is focused on applying epistemology

The technical application of philosophy – to get to the everyday things we do

How We Think, and How We Do

Percepts, Concepts, and Abstract Concepts – Abstract concepts are the components that enables us to reason.

Concepts defined by a word, described by a definition. The word and definition replace the real thing and its pattern **of first-level concepts** in our minds, to make abstract concepts possible.

Causality is the component of reality that makes it possible for us to comprehend reality in all its complexity.

Causal Analysis is how we connect our mind to reality.

Concepts make "the universe knowable by bringing it within the range of man's consciousness." – In other words, within his mental capabilities to understand. The process used is analysis.

Two Connections from Theory to Practice

Analysis is the detailed steps we use to rationally resolve complex, interrelated issues.

Methods are the detailed processes we use to take complex, coordinated series of actions.

Study those techniques and look for ways to improve them, <u>recursively</u> applying them to themselves, to improve our capabilities

Complex means that which is beyond the immediately, intuitively, obviously, or implicitly graspable and knowable.

Automatized vs. Conscious Thought

Automatized = habit = second nature.

Analysis and Method are required for Conscious Thought.

Epistemological Value Judgements – What we choose what to think about – "shoes" vs. "liberty" – applying ITOE to our advantage and benefit.

Thinking in Principle - Goal-directed action is always superior to reaction, to random action, to pragmatic action, and to unguided action. Consistent goal-directed action requires identifying principles.

Techniques

Situational Awareness – reading other drivers

Planning - The better the reasoning, the better the capability to plan. Every leader,
good or bad, makes plans.

That planning works is shown on a regular basis by leading businessmen.

Examples include the decades-long strategies and expectations behind successful aircraft makers, skyscraper owners, and electric companies with nuclear power plants.

The greatest and perhaps clearest example of abstract principles that were successfully applied to a concrete situation is the creation of the United States Constitution, with the subsequent impact of more than two centuries of successful operation

Methods

Evolutionary or Revolutionary – refinement or thinking outside of the box? eg, the propeller

If evolutionary change is inadequate, then it must be abandoned. A replacement is revolutionary.

Notebooks – Food for Thought

Thinking Errors

Cynicism – the view that reality has some hidden menace, that it is waiting for us at some key point, and that it will spring itself upon us at a most inopportune time, foiling all our plans and efforts.

Pessimism – the view that any good we obtain from our effort will be overshadowed by the bad which also results.

Skepticism – the view that we lack the knowledge we need to succeed.

Resignation – the view that we should give up, and succumb to whatever fate awaits us.

Fatalism – the view that we are doomed to failure.

Stasis – satisfaction with things as they are, or with the status quo; resistance to change.

Cynical Practicality – the view that we might as well resign ourselves to doing whatever sells; that we do whatever works for the moment.

In contrast to these errors, however, the valid thinking is that we are able to accomplish what we set out to do, that we are efficacious. Contrary to a certain famous naysayer, we did build that.

Persistence – We never give up. The solution is found in training, and in practice.

And we will build the next thing, and the next. We know it takes diligence and persistence, knowing it can be accomplished, knowing how to do it, overcoming whatever obstacles come in our way, and getting it done.

The evidence that we can be and for the most part are efficacious is all around us: everything that is beyond being a hunter-gatherer whose only hope of his next meal is what he can find in the time ahead, and who finds whatever shelter happens to be available, is proof that people are generally efficacious.

Of course we built that. Only an idiot would think otherwise.

Methods of Teaching

informal and formal

Fitting the method to the student

Iterative teaching – saying the same thing in different ways

Methods of Learning

Learning from your mistakes

Learning from others' mistakes

Learning from experience

Practice and training

Learning from formal training

Learning, and reinventing

Methods of Analysis

Breaking down a problem into its component pieces

Analysis breaks down that implicit "black box" into explicit components that can be individually considered, analyzed, and improved. In turn, the same is true for each component.

Iterative analysis – do the part you understand; repeat.

Measurement

Scheduling, breaking a task into shorter pieces to measure rate of progress

Methods of Action

Preparation and training – e.g., police, fire, EMTs, race car drivers, marathon runners, taking classes

The ability to transform a crisis into a non-event.

Panic

Time - Breaking down a prolonged action Into near-term Intervals

Checklists

Experience Level and Depth

One year of experience ten times, or ten years of experience one time?

specialist / PhD or jack-of-all-trades / Polymath?

Presentation – first impressions

Perishable skills and recurrency training

Attitude

Problem-solving

Open-ended vs. closed problems

Baby steps

Personal "downshifting"

The Evolutionary Development of Abstract Conceptualization

Treating first-level concepts as percepts – leads to concepts about concepts

Connecting concepts – positive feedback loop

Discipline and Value Judgements – the first step to "ought" and ethics

Curiosity

Learning for animals – by watching, imitating

        for people – explaining – requires abstract conceptualization

The Functional Parts of Our Minds

autonomous

subconscious / memory / instinctual

conscious mind – the only part capable of abstract conceptualization

The Arts

The mind's requirement to tie its concepts to <u>experience</u>

To the mind – especially the subconscious mind, abstract concepts are <u>real</u>

What seems important – "selective re-creation"

Lead to fictional images, stories, sounds – music

We call it "Art" but it is an unequivocal mental requirement

Time – "before" and "after" require abstract conceptualization

Animals recognize patterns, but not time

Neither does our subconscious, which remembers abstract concepts, but does not understand them for what they are. To the subconscious, they are just more data about "now".

Methods of Relationships and Politics

Politics is issues of ethics applied to interpersonal relationships (Ayn Rand)

Politics – not just Capitalism and government

Politics *is* relationships – courtesy, manners, customs, traditions, laws
         romantic, family, friends, acquaintances, strangers, enemies

Politics, leadership, failures of leadership, regimentation, teams, being a team player

Politics – Methods of Governance

Two types of governance – imposed or authorized

Participation and getting involved

Responsibility and failure of responsibility

Cultures, Legacies, and Beyond a Lifetime

Methods of cultures, social groupings

Tribal, Pre-Mesopotamian, Pre-Greek, American Indian

Revolutionary vs. Evolutionary Cultural Development

Indians, Africa, China vs. U.S.

Impact of Cultural Mindsets on the Thinking Process

American, American Indian, British and Canadian, European, Brazilian, Indian, non-Western

The classic American mindset is <u>*not*</u> normal – but it should be the future

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