

# Study Guide for *Understanding Objectivism*

by Dr. Leonard Peikoff

## Lecture One

- What are the three mistaken views of philosophy that Peikoff names? Give original examples of how each view plays out in a person's life.
- What conclusion emerges from all three views? What is the basic cause of all three views?
- What value does someone derive from holding an explicit philosophy?
- Why is it so important to grasp abstractions with the same clarity as perceptions?
- What makes Objectivism both the easiest and most difficult philosophy to grasp?
- Describe the mistaken views of the means by which one can learn a philosophy?
- What does the metaphor "conceptual chewing" mean in regard to ideas?
- Name and explain the three dichotomies that contribute to the rationalist/empiricist split.

## Lecture Two

- What is the main difference between a wholly correct statement of a philosophic point and an example of understanding that concept?
- Explain how to establish a proper context for discussing a key philosophic idea.
- How does specifying and grasping the exact meaning of a concept play a vital role in ensuring that the right context is set up?
- When is giving a definition helpful, and when can it be harmful in thinking about how to digest an idea?
- What does it mean to oscillate between definitions and concretes?
- Indicate, using an original example, what a process of reduction is.
- How does the iterative expansion and contraction of the topic help one to understand more fully?
- Following the exercise that Dr. Peikoff suggests at the end of the lecture, choose one or two terms to provide a definition of, to list a few concrete examples of, and to list attributes that are not definitional.

## Lecture Three

- What is the important dual nature of all the Objectivist virtues?
- Describe the nature of empiricism in regard to attempting to understand a concept such as honesty. What are its characteristic signs? What does it specifically lack?
- What does Dr. Peikoff mean when he criticizes the example chewing of honesty as having “inadequate context”?
- How can one use the devil’s advocacy approach without becoming too polemical?
- Explain the role of hierarchy in explaining how you understand a topic given the interrelatedness of all philosophic principles? What is a characteristic way that this approach is violated?
- Why does the need for acting on principle precede fully understanding any of the Objectivist virtues?
- What are the two roots of the concept principle?
- What would a specific proof of any of the Objectivist virtues require? How could you ground them in reality so that they have “truck-like” clarity?
- Explain in brief the spiral theory of knowledge as it applies to chewing and understanding ideas.

## Lecture Four

- What guidance should one follow when picking examples to illustrate an issue?
- What is the difference between an argument in principle and one that is fully concretized?
- How can the use of examples sometimes get in the way of understanding?
- When setting the context for understanding a point in one branch of philosophy, how can one set the context of hierarchically prior material?
- Explain using three original examples how force stops the mind.
- Why is it necessary to specify the nature of individual rights?
- What facts about morality inform the political question of rights?

**Before listening to lecture five, complete the exercise of placing the items in this list in order from most fundamental to most derivative:**

1. Capitalism as the only moral system
2. Romanticism as the conceptual school of art
3. A is A

4. The virtue of independence
5. The evil of the initiation of force
6. Knowledge as objective (versus intrinsic or subjective)
7. The senses as valid
8. Existence exists
9. The virtue of honesty
10. Concepts as identifications of concretes with their measurements omitted
11. The integration of man's mind and body
12. The validation of individual rights
13. Consciousness as the faculty of perceiving that which exists
14. The nature of art, and its role in man's life
15. Reason as man's only means of knowledge
16. Reason versus mysticism
17. Reason as man's means of survival
18. The proper functions of government
19. Rationality as the primary virtue
20. The law of cause and effect
21. Man's life as the standard of moral value.

## Lecture Five

- What does a grasp of the hierarchical position of some particular idea contribute to your knowledge of that point?
- Why is hierarchy specifically an epistemological point?
- What is one area where the strict logical hierarchy of Objectivist points actually contains some options?
- What is the difference between the order of acquiring knowledge and the hierarchical structure of knowledge?

## Lecture Six

- What does the lack of automatic knowledge lead to for the subjectivist?
- What is the "blurring out" method of starting to understand complicated topics?

- Why is the trichotomy that Dr. Peikoff describes agnostic regarding the content of a person's ideas?
- Why must the intrinsicist reject purpose? Context? Optionality?
- How does intrinsicism lead to overly harsh self-criticism?
- What are the eight ways that consciousness contributes something to how we gain knowledge of the world? What does this mean about describing objectivity primarily as a method?

## Lecture Seven

- What is the main difference between rationalism as a methodology and as a philosophic school? What are the similarities?
- Why does the rationalist take ideas and abstractions above reality? What might be an honest but mistaken motivation for this?
- What means of logical analysis is favored by the rationalist?
- Describe how rationalism leads to determinism.
- What role do self-evidencies play for a rationalist? How does this tend toward monism?
- How does rationalism interpret the question of certainty?
- How does the rationalist end up stuck in concretes despite his preference for abstractions?
- How does compartmentalization play a role in rationalism?
- Describe some of the ways that a concern for order and system affects rationalism's approach to ideas.
- How do emotions function for a rationalist?
- Why do rationalists feel compelled to engage in polemics?

## Lecture Eight

- How does the empiricist focus on reality apart from abstractions?
- What does the empiricist characteristically take as the best process for thinking about an issue?
- When the empiricist rejects principles, why does he nevertheless end up dealing with floating abstractions in addition to concretes?
- What role do definitions play for an empiricist?
- Explain the pluralist approach to fundamental ideas.
- How does the empiricist regard certainty?
- What kind of "system" of thinking do empiricists allow?

- Explain how emotions fit into the empiricist approach?
- Contrast empiricist approaches to argument and disagreement to that of rationalist ones.
- Why do intrinsicism and subjectivism naturally correspond to rationalism and empiricism?
- Why are rationalism and empiricism not the only possible mistaken alternatives? What are the others aside from eclectic ones?

## Lecture Nine

- How does the Objectivist view of mind-body integration affect its view of the role of ideas? Of definitions?
- What does this mind-body integration do when one is in a process of thinking about abstractions?
- How does the Objectivist methodology approach the role of induction and deduction?
- What is the answer that Dr. Peikoff provides for the “problem” of induction?
- Using a novel example, explain the role of integration and delimitation in the process of induction.
- How does the Objectivist methodology approach the role and status of axioms?
- How does the Objectivist methodology, especially its perspective on induction, play a crucial role in understanding certainty?
- What is the unique approach suggested by Objectivist when it comes to polemics? Using a novel example, present an outline sketch of this approach

## Lecture Ten

- How does the rationalist approach the idea of ethical judgment? What are moral principles in this approach? Provide some examples.
- What is the subsequent approach to emotions for the rationalist? How does he believe emotions are related to ethics?
- How does the empiricist approach ethical judgment? What guides him in making moral choices?
- What is the role of emotions in empiricist approaches to ethics?
- Why does the empiricist and not the rationalist embrace purpose and context in ethics? How do these ideas fail to live up to human needs?
- How does the empiricist always end up taking the rationalist dogma as the content of ethics?
- Explain how Objectivism is a contextual ethics in the proper sense.

- How does Objectivism understand the role of emotion in human life?
- What are the five key areas of life in which emotions are crucial?
- Explain using original examples in at least three areas of life the vital understanding of the role of optional values in Objectivism.
- How does this perspective on emotions affect how we understand the process of judging another person or oneself?

## Lecture Twelve

- Why is it so vital to assess the degree of honesty in a person with whom one disagrees on fundamental questions?
- What is the minimum required of a wrong belief to suggest that it can be held honestly?
- What are the three categories of inherently dishonest ideas? Why does holding these ideas necessitate a dishonest approach to dealing with ideas?
- What are some of the major factors that condition how we evaluate a person's context for holding an idea?
- What signs might one look for in an argument that illustrate a mind that is honest versus dishonest in its approach?
- How can one use the distinction between the implicit and explicit meaning of ideas in judging a person's honesty about a given idea?
- What is the role of dependence and conformity in judging dishonesty?
- How does the approach to judging intellectual honesty help us answer the question of whether philosophy puts us in constant opposition to other people?