ARISTOTLE, EINSTEIN, AND AYN RAND

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February 2, 2005, the centennial of Ayn Rand's birthday. It was too optimistic 19 years ago to soon expect a greater appreciation of objective reality in our culture, for our current cultural curse is the pathological rejection of it, typified by the insane fanaticism that pretends a man by sheer mystical incantation can change himself into a woman and destroy women's sports or their privacy in public bathrooms thereby. Subjectivism and moral relativism must be replaced by acknowledgement of reality for our culture to survive. This tragedy begins by Einstein mistakenly calling his theory one of relativity.]

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Ever played the Ultimate Dinner Party parlor game – where you get to imagine inviting people from history to converse over dinner and explain why them? At such a party, one conversation I'd most like to hear would be between Aristotle and Einstein.

Einstein would first have to bring Aristotle up to speed with what science had learned since the 4th century B.C. In particular, he would blow Aristotle's mind about inertia.

Once Aristotle grasped Newton's First Law explaining motion – that something will stay put unless pushed, but once pushed will keep moving until and unless something else stops it – it would alter his entire concept of the structure of the universe requiring an Unmoved Mover (Aristotle thought that for something to move it had to

be continuously pushed, and if the pushing stopped so would its moving).

But once he digested this and Einstein paused to take a breath, Aristotle would ask him – "So, all of us here at dinner are famous – what are you famous for?" When Einstein answered, "The Theory of Relativity," Aristotle would respond: "What is it that's relative?"

"Time is relative," comes the reply. "People, or 'observers,' experience time differently if they are moving differently from one another, or are in what I call different 'inertial reference frames.' Since we're all in one big such frame called Earth, time is the same – but for people outside it, in a spaceship, say, it would be different."

(An example: GPS navigation works because of special relativity. The clocks of orbiting satellites tick at a different speed than those on Earth because of their differing velocities. Yet GPS technology needs to have clocks in perfect synch with those on Earth to allow it to nail down position to a precise degree.

The slight difference between satellite and earth clocks would cause errors of several parts per billion. This would be enough to make them useless for all modern purposes including aerial and submersible navigation and military operations. Einstein's equations correct the difference, so that airplanes land on the runway and not 40 feet to the side.)

"So time is, as I always maintained, a 'measurement of motion,' and if the motion is different for one set of people than another, then time will also be different for them?" Aristotle would inquire next.

"Exactly!" says Einstein with a smile. "Which means there can't be anything at absolute rest – it's always moving relative to something else – for if something were at absolute rest, there would be…"

They both say together with a laugh… "No time!"

After another glass of wine and perhaps a little small talk, Aristotle would want to press further. "Still, nothing is simply relative, just like nothing is simply 'large.' A thing can be 'large' only in comparison to something else. So there must be something constant, something that always stays the same, to hold your "Relativity' theory together."

"Yes," replies Albert (it's Albert and Ari by now), "the speed of light. The speed of light is always the same, no matter how fast or slow anyone or anything is moving relative to anyone or anything else. Suppose you throw a spear. The spear will go faster if you are running while you throw it and not standing still, as you add your speed to the spear's.

"But light isn't that way. You could be running a thousand, a million, stades a second and if you lit a torch, the light from it would not move the slightest bit faster than if you were standing still."

Aristotle would be stunned. First to know that light goes that fast (the Greek measurement of distance was the stade, equaling 600 feet; at 8.8 stades to the mile, light travels at 1,584,000 stades a second) – and secondly, that it goes that fast – never faster, never slower – no matter the speed of its source.

Yet once he had assimilated this, there is no doubt about what he would ask his new friend Albert next: "Then why isn't your theory called The Theory of Constancy, since all of what is 'relative' depends on this constant?"

We can be sure that, after seeing how Aristotle's mind works by reading his *Metaphysics* and other books, this

would be his central question to Einstein. What is a puzzle is why this question was never posed by Aristotle's 20th century intellectual heir, Ayn Rand.

2005 is a twin-centennial for Rand and Einstein. Today, February 2, is the centennial of Ayn Rand's birth in 1905.

This week, scientists around the world launched a series of commemorations of the centennial of the *annus mirabilis*, the "miraculous year" of 1905, when a 26 year-old unknown clerk in a Swiss patent office published five papers in an obscure journal that revolutionized science and changed the way we look at the universe. In one of these, "On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies," Einstein introduced his Theory of Special Relativity.

Yet this was an incredible misnomer – for what Einstein did was replace one absolute – time – with another – the speed of light. This misnomer is one of the great social tragedies of modern times.

The more famous Einstein became, the more his theories were parodied. "I'm famous because everyone understands me," Charlie Chaplin told Einstein, "while you're famous because no one understands you."

This allowed every intellectual fraud in the world to transform relativity into relativism. As Time Magazine editor Walter Isaacson put it when Time proclaimed Einstein to be "The Person of the Century" (January 3, 2000 issue):

> *"Einstein's theory of relativity not only upended physics, it also jangled the underpinnings of society. For nearly three centuries, the clockwork universe of Galileo and Newton—which was based on absolute laws and certainties—formed the psychological foundation for the Enlightenment, with its belief in causes and effects, order, rationalism, even duty.*
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> *Now came a view of the universe in which space and time were all relative. Indirectly, relativity paved the way for a new relativism in morality, arts and politics. There was less faith in absolutes, not only of time and space but also of truth and morality. 'It formed a knife,' historian Paul Johnson says of relativity theory, 'to help cut society adrift from its traditional moorings'."*

If you want to say something that will infuriate me more than anything else, start spouting bromides like, "There are no absolutes," "Well, what's true for you isn't true for me," or "No one knows anything for certain."

My response will be to slap you in the face. When you angrily ask why I hit you, I'll shake my head and deny it, asking "How do you know I hit you? After all, you of all people can't assert you know I did."

Subjectivism – the whim-worshipping assertion that there is no objective reality, truth, or morality – is what Ayn Rand dedicated her life to opposing. She is the unmatched champion of individual freedom, of every human being's right to live for his or her own sake, of laissez-faire capitalism. Yet she did not name her philosophy after any of these.

Drilling into philosophical bedrock instead, she called it Objectivism, the core tenet of which is: *Existenceexists, A is A.* Things are what they are, and all the wishes and temper-tantrums of relativists won't make something what it is not. Our awareness does not create the world: the world exists independently of our awareness of it.

Almost 40 years ago, a friend gave me a copy of Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*. Reading *Atlas* remains to this day the most thrilling intellectual experience of my life. Rand's masterwork, written a half-century ago, continues to sell hundreds of thousands of copies a year.

I believe her struggle against subjectivism is coming to an end, just as is the conversion of relativity into relativism.

Einstein struggled for the rest of his life against relativism, particularly within that branch of physics known as "quantum mechanics." From his famous assertion that "God does not play dice with the Universe," he argued against the subjectivity of quantum mechanics and its Uncertainty Principle, as it did not describe objective properties of a physical system but rather the state of knowledge of the observers who probe it.

You can expect to see a welter of articles in science journals during the *annus mirabilis* centennial arguing for Einstein and against a fundamentally probabilistic physics. And expect a similar welter from a growing number of philosophers and social commentators arguing that Ayn Rand was right about objective reality and objective morality.

The 20th century was the Age of Relativism. Yet it provided overwhelming evidence, via such nightmares as Naziism, Fascism, and Communism, that moral relativism is depraved nonsense. The 21st century awoke with Islamofascism providing an undeniable proof of objective immorality.

There is a good chance now that this new century may become the Age of Objectivity, in both science and ethics. For this, we should acknowledge and give thanks to two giants who made it possible, Einstein and Ayn Rand.

Aristotle would approve.