

Leonard Peikoff
The DIM Hypothesis
Objectivist Conferences July 2010

Summary of Material Covered at OCON, Telluride, 2007

If you are unfamiliar with the material in the first half of my book, please read carefully the first 6 pages of this handout. At the beginning of the opening lecture (Saturday, July 3), I will go over the highlights of these pages, but a knowledge of all the material they contain is necessary to your understanding of the present course. As to the rest of this handout, after page 6 you may read, skim, and/or use selectively when helpful.

But do note the summaries in the form of charts, and also the list, on pages 6, 14, and 15. You should keep these easily available during the lectures.

.....

The DIM Hypothesis, in brief, holds that the essence of Western societies lies in their view of the fundamental process of the human mind: integration. The West's view of integration has changed several times across the centuries, in each case as a result of definable causes. If we understand the logic of this progression, we will have a basis for a prediction about the future.

.....

Integration

The capacity to integrate perceptual data is the essence of a conceptual consciousness, and thus of a rational faculty; it is the capacity which distinguishes man from the animals.

“Integration” is the formation of a whole by connecting otherwise separate items; as the Greeks put it, it is grasping or creating a “One in the Many.” Integration in some form is essential to all human behavior. A few examples from the realm of cognition: a concept is an integration of percepts (see ITOE); a generalization is an integration of facts within a delimited category or area; a philosophy is an integration of all facts.

Because integration is the essence of thought, the process is indispensable not merely to cognition, but to any human achievement. A few examples: the plot of *Atlas* is an integration of events, each necessitated by the theme. The curriculum of a purposeful school is an integration of subject matters, both content and sequence flowing from the purpose. The laws of the country created by the Founding Fathers are (were) a system, i.e., a connected series, each necessary to implement the founding principles. Integration in short is everywhere, and it is of unique importance everywhere.

The opposite of integration is juxtaposition, i.e., the proximity of items without connection, the “Many without the One.” Example: the world to an infant, which is a stream of unrelated, “brute” sense data. Or: an American high school teaching students a stream of unrelated and unexplained topics. Or a mixed economy whose laws are a stream of ephemeral, and often contradictory, favors to warring pressure groups.

The Big Three

In regard to integration, human beings have three basic alternatives: they can do it validly, they can do it invalidly, or they can oppose doing it. This threefold choice applies not merely to integration, but to all volitional action. E.g., one can choose one’s diet validly, i.e., rationally; or invalidly (a macrobiotic diet, an all-vodka diet, etc.); or, so far as sheer survival allows, one can oppose the intake of food as such, as is done in some version by anorexics or medieval ascetics.

In regard to integration, each of the three alternatives was championed by one of the Big Three philosophers: Plato, Aristotle, Kant. Each alternative flows from a different set of fundamental premises.

Valid integration was first defined by Aristotle. In metaphysics, its philosophic base is secularism, i.e., the view that this world in which we live is reality and the only reality; in epistemology, it holds that knowledge consists of conclusions reached by the conceptualization, direct or indirect, of sensory data. As a result, what Aristotle tells the integrator is: when you integrate, in any realm of endeavor, you must ignore any alleged facts beyond Nature; you must start with the facts given by observation; and then, most important, you must identify and explain these facts by connecting them conceptually (which, he notes, requires both induction and deduction). In the Objectivist view, Aristotle’s is the only rational viewpoint, which is why I take it as the paradigm of “valid” in this context.

To symbolize the Aristotelian approach, my book uses the letter I. I for integration.

Invalid integration (invalid, according to Objectivism) was first defined by Plato. Metaphysically, its base is supernaturalism (often called idealism), i.e., the view that reality is a transcendent, non-material dimension (Forms, and/or God, etc.), this world being merely its unreal appearance. In epistemology, Platonism is rationalism, i.e., the view that conceptual knowledge is the essence of human cognition, but that such knowledge (or at least its fundamentals) is not secular and cannot be derived from the senses; rather, knowledge is *a priori*, i.e., independent of sense experience, which latter may—and often actually does—reveal its deceptiveness by conflicting with the *a priori*. So Plato's advice to the integrator: turn away from the world—your goal is to grasp the connections within true reality; the senses, at best, are a temporary ladder to facilitate your mind's climb away from the physical. To discover connections, accordingly, induction is irrelevant; the proper method is deductive logic from the intuitively self-evident.

Note that although Plato's is an invalid approach, he is still a champion (and a world-class practitioner) of integration. The Platonist is no less an integrator than the Aristotelian. However irrational his foundation, he still works to grasp the connections within reality as he defines it; he still seeks to reach the One in the Many. In Plato's own case, e.g., he sought to grasp a fundamental entity, the Form of the Good, which he held to be the source and ultimate explanation of all else, and thus the unifier of everything qualifying as real.

Plato and Aristotle agreed that man, through the use of an integrated system of concepts, must work to grasp the connections among things. But they did not agree on the locus of the connections or on the relation of man's conceptual system to observation.

I symbolize Plato's method by M, misintegration, to indicate that it is integration, but mistakenly performed.

Anti-integration was first defined by Kant. Integration, in Kant's view, is not a process by which one gains knowledge of reality, and so it is not an activity to be treasured, as earlier philosophy had held. Rather, the opposite is true: man's need to integrate is the fatal flaw in human consciousness—in effect, it is the mind's Original Sin. Why? The very process of integrating data, Kant explains, transforms and taints the data, thereby cutting man off forever from reality. In other words, reality is unknowable and our consciousness is invalid—because man's means of knowledge is conceptual. Kant's advice to the would-be integrator: integration is a

self-deluding activity, and a corrupting one at that—because those who practice it as a means to truth are really pushing mankind into fantasy and thus ever further from truth. Of course, he holds, being human our survival requires us to integrate now, within the confines of the surface world of appearance—but only if we recognize that this endeavor has no fundamental basis or significance.

Kant's followers soon went all the way, concluding that conceptualization as such must be stamped out, and specifically that our culture must be stripped of its delusions, thereby revealing to men the truth, which is: total disintegration. A cultural creator, accordingly, must discard all the traditional elements in his product, i.e., all the elements that involve and implicitly approve integration. In other words, cultural products in all areas—art, science, and more—must be smashed into disconnected fragments. The name for this viewpoint is: nihilism.

I symbolize the Kantian approach by D, for disintegration.

Now you know why I call my idea the DIM theory. The order of the letters in this acronym is chosen only for euphony. It is chronologically incorrect, and has nothing to do with being unintelligent.

My book undertakes to interpret the progression of Western history by discovering which of these three approaches to integration is dominant in a given period. I survey six periods: Greece, Rome, the Middle Ages, the Age of Reason, the Enlightenment, and the Modern.

The Two Mixtures

To hold in mind three possibilities while studying six cultures may seem to be a daunting task but the task is even more complex, because the history of philosophy reveals that there is a major split within the M and the D categories (but not within the I). There are two competing interpretations of M, and two of D, and each of the four has at some point been historically influential.

The split in M is between pure Platonists, and what I call “mixed” Platonists, best represented in modern times by Descartes. This version of M tries to combine Plato and Aristotle (or, in today's language, religion and science). In metaphysics, this school accepts the fundamental of Plato: reality is a supernatural realm; but after all, the viewpoint goes on, it is God (or the like) who created this world, and so this world must also be real and of real importance, even though it is only

secondary. Aristotle, therefore, is right to extol Nature—but wrong to regard it as self-sufficient and all-embracing. In epistemology, Plato’s fundamental is again right: *a priori* knowledge is indispensable as man’s cognitive base. But Aristotle is right that we cannot dismiss sensory data; he is right that we must try to connect and explain what we perceive—his error is his failure to see that explanation is possible only on the basis of *a priori* concepts.

Note that this variant of M, despite the clash between its philosophic sources, is not a juxtaposition of ideas, but a true integration: it gives Plato primacy, then tries not to add Aristotle eclectically, but rather to interpret his ideas as a necessary corollary of Plato’s. I call this approach “worldly supernaturalism,” and symbolize it by M_1 , as against pure Platonism, M_2 . The subscript $_1$ in my notation always denotes a mixed version, while the subscript $_2$ denotes a pure version.

The split in D is between the pure Kantians (D_2) and the “mixed” Kantians (D_1). The latter approach was created mainly by Comte and Mill. This version of D attempts to combine Kant and Aristotle (or, to be exact, one essential element of Aristotle—his embrace of the senses and thus his dismissal of the supernatural—while rejecting the rest). The D_1 s agree with Kant that consciousness is subjective and reality unknowable; but since it is unknowable, they go on, we must reject the very concept of “reality” as meaningless (or as they say “metaphysical”). Existence is—and is only—that which men perceive; it is a flow of sense data, the source and epistemological status of which we cannot even think about. Sense data, therefore, are the only possible elements for integrators to try to connect. But, this approach continues, “grasping connections” has nothing to do with the method of Plato or Aristotle, i.e., it does not involve the notion that concepts are some kind of non-sensory faculty allegedly giving us knowledge inaccessible to direct observation; in this issue, all the Greeks are wrong, but Kant is right. Our consciousness has access only to that which it directly experiences.

Despite the above, the D_1 school agrees with Aristotle in denying *a priori* knowledge; and, within its own stoutly defended limitations, the school agrees with him that worldly knowledge is possible to man and important. Further, the D_1 s even agree with Aristotle, to a modest extent, that concepts play a role in cognition—a role, but not an indispensable one. Generalizations, the school holds, are a convenient shorthand enabling us to refer in a few words to many observable concretes (“All men are mortal” versus “Tom is mortal,” “Dick is mortal,” etc.); such shorthand, however, does not tell us anything more than what we already knew directly (e.g., from watching individual men die). A generalization, therefore, is not a step to discovering a deeper cause, validating a broader principle, nor is it even a base for a logically valid extrapolation to the future.

In the D_1 view, the narrower a generalization and so the closer the shorthand to the perceptual level, the more acceptable it is; whereas the more broadly abstract it is, the less its trustworthiness and value (Comte regarded the laws of logic as self-evidently useless). D_1 s, accordingly, confine themselves to what Objectivists would call the lower levels of cognition; they advocate many self-contained integrations—each within a relatively narrow area, each disconnected from the others. This is what I call “integration in chunks.”

D_1 s are firm in their praise of science. Within their definitions, they demand thought which is based on observation, organized logically, and defended objectively (“interpersonally”). I call D_1 s the “knowing skeptics.”

So there are five possible approaches to integration. D_2 and D_1 —anti-integration (total and partial). I—valid integration. M_2 and M_1 —invalid integration (total or partial supernaturalism).

Terminological note: I call each of these five approaches a “mode of integration,” or simply a “mode,” the adjective being “modal.” In other words, I use the term “mode” inclusively, to denote any approach to integration—any view of its nature, method, value/disvalue—that flows from philosophic fundamentals.

MODES OF INTEGRATION

- | | | |
|-------|------------|--|
| I | Aristotle: | Unity through: secular world/grasped by concepts abstracted from percepts. |
| M_2 | Plato: | Unity through: transcendent world/grasped by concepts independent of percepts; secular world is unreal, and percepts may be in conflict with concepts. |
| M_1 | Descartes: | Unity through: M_2 above, except: secular world is real, and concepts to a significant extent must be applied to percepts.* |
| D_2 | Kant: | Unity impossible and undesirable; both concepts and percepts are detached from reality. |
| D_1 | Comte: | Unity, in disconnected chunks of percepts, through: secular world/grasped by lower-level concepts. |

* Descartes is an eloquent modern representative but in no way the originator of this mode.

Role of Modes in History

Philosophy, according to Objectivism, is the fundamental factor shaping men's minds, and as a result their values and actions. But how does philosophy shape men's minds? Most people do not accept philosophical ideas directly, by reading philosophical books or the like. In my view, philosophy shapes men through its implications for the way we should think (i.e., integrate). These implications reach even non-philosophical men, who also need some cognitive guides. And the integrative guides can reach such men in a society, because the guides take the form not of broad abstractions, but of understandable concretes—concretes which embody a specific mode and are its proselytizers.

The modal consistency of such concretes in a given period reveals a society's underlying philosophy. If we discover what people actually do with their minds during a thought process, we have thereby discovered an era's real motivating philosophy.

To discover a culture's mode of integration, we must select and study some representative cultural areas, and then generalize. These areas must offer products or institutions dealt with regularly and approvingly (or at least tolerated) by the public at the time. The four most crucial areas are: literature, physics (science), education, and politics. Let me repeat: I am not here studying philosophic theories as such, but philosophy in cultural action. In regard to art, e.g., I am not concerned with esthetics, nor even with the philosophic ideas stated by an author, but with poems and novels—in education, with the method of teaching and the curricula of the period—in politics, with the governments actually in power.

If my Hypothesis is correct, we will find the following. First, that in the whole history of Western culture, there have been only five modes of integration. And, second, that the progression of Western history reveals a pattern of modal change which makes the rise and fall of each mode intelligible. This knowledge will give us an objective basis on which to extrapolate, and thus to predict with some specificity “what's next” for the West and most importantly for the U.S.

For several reasons, my historical survey in the book begins with the West's development from 1600 to the present. This material was covered at Telluride; as

an aid to newcomers, I have included a bullet-point description of the movements in each area and era already covered; if this is too much for your “crow,” forget about it. The present course starts with Greece.

LITERATURE (17TH CENTURY TO PRESENT)

SEQUENCE ONE: *Classicism as M₁*

- Drama’s primary concern is with a character’s mental state, not with his actions.
- The mind-body conflict is definitive of its characters.
- The characters are not fully individualized.
- The “self-evident” criteria of esthetic merit include: clarity, emotional restraint, symmetry, dignity, and unity.
- The application of these abstractions to the concretes of a play.
- Classicism is at root religious yet, within that framework, worldly.
- The Classicists’ elevation of Form over Matter; the Form is a play’s integrator.
- Classicism as M₁.

SEQUENCE TWO: *Romanticism as I*

- Romanticism’s root is its acceptance of free will.
- Romanticist literature is action-oriented; it features plot and heroes, plot being a progression of logically connected events.
- Romanticism depicts things “as they might be and ought to be” here on earth.
- The writer grasps larger-than-life heroes by abstraction from observed non-heroes.
- The theme (not the Form) is the integrator of an art work.
- Concepts and percepts must be integrated.
- Romanticism as I.

SEQUENCE THREE: *Naturalism as D₁*

- A novelist is a recorder, not an evaluator, of men’s lives.
- Men are pre-determined, and life includes the ugly.
- The behavior of Naturalist characters is unexplained.
- Plots are artificial, since life is not logical.
- Naturalism does offer some integration between character traits and between story events, but only in disconnected chunks.

- Naturalism as D₁.

SEQUENCE FOUR: Modernism as D₂

- Story, and more broadly intelligible events, is “a naïve pretension of bourgeois rationality.”
- Modernism eliminates characterization.
- It campaigns against values.
- It rejects theme in favor of non-objective symbolism.
- The Modernists’ use of language.
- Modernism is nihilism in art.
- Modernism as D₂.

SEQUENCE FIVE: Socialist Realism as M₂

- Literature is a didactic social tool.
- Its stories depict the class struggle and the ultimate triumph of the Communists.
- Socialist Realists are guided by higher laws of history whose truth they know independent of observation; what is happening in reality is not what we see, but what we deduce must be happening.
- Characterization is the presentation of the collective; the individual, when he appears, is virtually characterless.
- In Socialist Realist literature, the theme is the art work.
- Socialist Realism as M₂.

EDUCATION (17TH CENTURY TO PRESENT)

SEQUENCE ONE: Classical Education as M₁

- Education is the study and mastery of Greco-Roman civilization.
- Education should give priority to the traditional over the modern, the profound over the worldly, the spiritual over the materialistic.
- The necessity of “sharpening” the student’s mind and his ability to reason.
- This requires a logically structured curriculum, beginning with the Trivium.
- The primacy of Latin, including its grammar, and of text over worldly observation; i.e., of abstractions over experience.
- A teacher should present objective philosophical principles, often (though not always) in the form of religious dogma to be accepted on faith.
- The Christian piety of Classical educators.

- Abstractions are the necessary means of access to the world of the pagans, which these educators regard as fully real.
- Classical Education as M_1 .

SEQUENCE TWO: Progressive Education as D_2

- Progressive Education, based on the philosophy of pragmatism, regards action as prior to thought; learning by doing.
- Schools must scrap the elements of intellectualism, such as texts, lecturing, lesson plans, exams, and the traditional division of subject matter (history, geometry, etc.).
- Teachers are not cognitive authorities, but sometimes helpful guides.
- The child must develop “self-expression” and “social spirit.”
- Dewey’s concept of a “group” vs. Marx’s.
- The Progressive classroom, which requires feeling-dictated “doings,” is anti-conceptual.
- Progressive educators are avowedly unconcerned with teaching or learning.
- Progressive Education as D_2 .

SEQUENCE THREE: Pluralist Education as D_1

- Education serves not one, but a variety of purposes requiring a variety of courses, mostly disconnected from one another.
- Teaching traditional subjects is one, but not the most important, goal of education.
- When it does teach such subjects, the presentation is to be concrete-bound and perceptual-level.
- The leftist propoganda in the schools is not essential to their mode of integration.
- Pluralism vs. Progressivism in regard to generalizations.
- Pluralist Education as D_1 .

SEQUENCE FOUR: Ideological Indoctrination in Education as M_2

- Totalitarian Education (illustrated by Soviet Russia) pursues a single fundamental goal: to turn out the ideal Communist.
- All subjects must be taught within the correct ideological framework.
- So-called “objective facts” claimed to contradict this ideology are bourgeois inventions. Ideological concepts are independent of percepts.
- The effect of this education on the mind of the child.
- Floating abstractions are essential to the elimination of intellectual independence.
- Ideological Indoctrination in Education as M_2 .

SEQUENCE FIVE: Conceptual Education as I

- This is my name for the Objectivist approach (which does not yet exist as a cultural movement); it advocates teaching the child only one cognitive skill: how to become a conceptual-level thinker—as the means to successful life in this world.
- The curriculum includes only the three Rs along with science, mathematics, history, and literature.
- The curriculum omits college-level material such as philosophy, but does offer the child concrete data relevant to the latter.
- The teacher is a lecturer, not a moderator.
- All subjects are taught hierarchically.
- To the extent possible, the teacher must relate each point within a subject to others already covered, whether in the teacher’s own field or those of his colleagues.
- The teacher does not lecture on the correct method of using concepts; he does not teach epistemology; he exemplifies the right one.
- Conceptual Education as I.

POLITICS (17TH CENTURY TO PRESENT)

SEQUENCE ONE: Absolute Monarchy as M₁

- The Absolute monarch of a nation is its supreme political authority, claiming unlimited power.
- The divine right of kings, and its Biblical defense.
- The defenders of Absolute Monarchy are rationalists.
- The king is God's secular agent.
- Despite this rationalism, the citizens may legitimately criticize the king if, in their experience, his behavior is incompatible with Scripture or immoral by its standards.
- Absolute Monarchy as M₁.

SEQUENCE TWO: Capitalism as I

- Capitalism is based on man's individual rights, with government as no more than their protector.
- The secularism of the Founding Fathers.
- The Enlightenment's Aristotelianism; its rejection of rationalism.
- Capitalism as I.

SEQUENCE THREE: Political Pluralism as D₁

- Political Pluralism (e.g., the mixed economy) holds that government serves many goals, largely independent of one another.
- Inalienable rights are "metaphysical," and therefore an invalid idea.
- Ideology is "extremism"; each case must be judged on its own terms, not by reference to abstract principles.
- Pluralism allows lower-level generalizations.
- Arbitrary social desires are the basis of politics.
- Political Pluralism as D₁.

SEQUENCE FOUR: Totalitarianism as M_2

- Government must be unlimited (and uncriticizable), both in theory (including morality) and in practice.
- The primacy (for Communism) of the economic class.
- Marx on economic determinism and the class struggle.
- Marx on the dialectic process.
- The dictatorship of the proletariat necessitates the emergence of the Communist Party.
- The withering away of the State.
- Marxism's rationalism and idealism.
- Totalitarianism as M_2 .

SEQUENCE FIVE: Egalitarianism as D_2

- Egalitarianism advocates "equality of results" as the fundamental moral value.
- The greater achievement of some men over others is due to the luck of their genes and/or environment. The achievers, accordingly, deserve no moral recognition; on the contrary, their unequal possession of values is unfair and should not morally be tolerated.
- Egalitarian groups today request unprecedented redress for the inequalities from which they suffer.
- Absolute liberty is immoral, but "relative liberty" will be equal.
- The validation offered for egalitarianism.
- The perceptual-level approach of this school.
- Certain facts of reality are unfair, and therefore are not relevant to morality.
- The results of Egalitarianism in practice, according to two of its champions.
- Egalitarianism as D_2 .

Western History in DIM Terms

| <u>Culture</u> | <u>Dates</u> | <u>Literature</u> | <u>Education</u> | <u>Politics</u> | <u>Mode</u> |
|------------------------------------|--|-------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Greece | 500 – 300 B.C. | Homer | Rational Self-Fulfillment | Democracy | I |
| Rome | 300 B.C. – 400 A.D. (Including Hellenistic) | Virgil | Grammar School | Republic, Empire | M ₁ |
| Middle Ages | 400 – 1400 | Dante | Indoctrination | Totalitarianism | M ₂ |
| Renaissance | 1400 – 1600 | | Transitional | | ?/M ₁ |
| Age of Reason | 1600 – 1750 | Classicism | Classical | Absolute Monarchy | M ₁ |
| Enlightenment | 1750 – 1850 | Romanticism | Conceptual | Capitalism | I |
| Modern | 1850 – present | Naturalism | Pluralism | Mixed Economy | D ₁ |
| Modern | 1900 – present | Non-Objectivity | Progressivism | Egalitarianism | D ₂ |
| Modern (Eastern/Central Europe) | 1900 – 2000 | Socialist Realism | Indoctrination | Totalitarianism | M ₂ |

For Lecture 3

Factors relevant to modal change:

Instability of a mixed mode

Inability of an Establishment to defend its mode, because of philosophic deficiency

Modal rebellion by the intellectuals

Modal rebellion by the public

Knowledge of an acceptable alternative mode

Trigger(s)

The DIM Hypothesis
Table of Contents
(As of July 2010)

PART ONE: Epistemology (*delivered in Telluride*)

| | |
|----------|------------------------|
| Ch. I: | Integration |
| Ch. II: | The Three Archetypes |
| Ch. III: | The Two Mixtures |
| Ch. IV: | DIM and the Hypothesis |

PART TWO: DIM in Modern Culture (*delivered in Telluride*)

| | |
|-----------|--------------------------------------|
| Ch. V: | Literature |
| Ch. VI: | Physics (<i>omitted in course</i>) |
| Ch. VII: | Education |
| Ch. VIII: | Politics |

PART THREE: DIM in Pre-Modern Culture

| | |
|---------|-----------------|
| Ch. IX: | Greece |
| Ch. X: | Rome |
| Ch. XI: | The Middle Ages |

PART FOUR: The Future

| | |
|-----------|--|
| Ch. XII: | Identifying a Culture's Essence (<i>omitted in course</i>) |
| Ch. XIII: | The West's Modal Progression |
| Ch. XIV: | Secular Modes in the U.S. Today |
| Ch. XV: | The Anti-Secular Rebellion |
| Ch. XVI: | What's Next |