

The Objective Standard

Regarding Carl Barney and Scientology

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I recently posted a [tribute to Carl Barney](#) by Richard Minns and the Ayn Rand Center Israel, which honored Carl for his enormous, decades-long contributions to the advancement of Objectivism, free minds, free markets, and capitalism.

Shortly after I published that tribute, someone posted a link to it along with an attack on Carl, smearing him for having been involved in Scientology many years ago. The post essentially said that Carl is immoral for having been involved in the cult, and that he should not be praised but condemned.

That attack is absurd and unjust.

For forty years, Carl has embraced and advocated the philosophy of Objectivism—the philosophy whose central virtues are rationality (as against any form of mysticism or “just knowing”) and independent thinking (as against secondhandedness or “group think”). During these four decades, he has supported individuals and organizations dedicated to advancing Objectivism, political freedom, and human flourishing. He has funded the Ayn Rand Institute; Cato Institute; Clemson Institute for the Study of Capitalism; Objectivists at Duke University, University of Maryland, Tufts University, and George Mason University; Objectivists and Objectivist organizations throughout Europe, the Middle East, and Latin America; and indeed my own work and that of The Objective Standard.

Carl’s substantial contributions to these organizations and individuals have enabled them to advance the principles of reason, individualism, and capitalism much more effectively than they otherwise could have.

Yet Carl has been attacked because, earlier in life, he was involved with Scientology.

I asked Carl about his involvement with Scientology, and here’s what I learned.

He first heard about Scientology sixty years ago, when he was a teenager. This was in the organization’s early years, and its appeal to him was that it offered a system of ideas for self-improvement and business success. He got involved because he thought Scientology was a system of ideas for good living. Not only is there nothing wrong with this motive. It’s a *good* motive. That’s exactly what a young person (and every person) *should* want in life. And Carl found certain aspects of Scientology helpful in this regard. So he embraced and used those aspects in an effort to make a good life for himself, and encouraged others to do so too.

Over time, the leaders of the movement began steering Scientology less in the direction of ideas and tools for good living and more in the direction of mysticism and collectivism. Carl rejected

this development, and he and others who wanted to focus on personal growth and business success clashed with the leaders. In time, these success-focused rebels either left or were kicked out of Scientology (as Carl was) for not toeing the line and conforming to the cult.

Still eager to discover and use ideas for good living, and disgusted by his experiences in Scientology, Carl read Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* and discovered Objectivism. Using the principles of this "philosophy for living on earth," he succeeded in business and in life. Among other ventures, he built twenty private colleges that were extremely successful. Given his benevolent attitude, he wanted others to benefit from the philosophy of Objectivism. And given his success and the wealth he created, he was in a position to help financially. So he began supporting organizations that sought to advance the philosophy, including, and primarily, ARI.

From ARI's inception until recently, Carl was its top contributor and a key board member. Earlier this year, he parted ways with ARI because he didn't approve of its focus and direction. He now funds and runs an organization he created, the Prometheus Foundation, which includes the Objectivist Venture Fund (OVF).

Prometheus Foundation and OVF are dedicated to advancing Objectivism by funding promising intellectuals and ventures that focus on showing people the life-serving value of Rand's ideas and how to use them to live well and defend freedom. Carl's goal is simple: to introduce as many people as possible to the philosophy that has helped him to live a beautiful life—so that they can live such a life, too.

Many people subscribe to bad ideas or systems of thought in their youth and later repudiate those ideas or systems and adopt better ones. Dan Barker was an evangelical Christian preacher; now he and his wife are co-presidents of the Freedom from Religion Foundation. Ronald Reagan was a Hollywood leftist; in time, he came to understand (imperfectly) that leftist policies are contrary to the requirements of human life. Christopher Hitchens and David Horowitz were communists; in time, they came to realize that communism is contrary to the requirements of human life and became (imperfect) advocates of liberty and capitalism. Countless people have gone through such transformations. You probably know some personally. I know many. We don't condemn them for it. We champion their progress. This is the rational, just way to evaluate them.

Carl Barney got interested in Scientology as a teenager. When he came to see that it was harmful, he rejected it. He then discovered Objectivism, lived by its principles for decades and still does. With his success, he funds the advancement of Objectivism so that others can learn about the philosophy and use it to live rich and meaningful lives as well. Far from being cause for condemnation, this is cause for admiration and praise.