

Integrating Mind and Body

Matthew Stoloff

Despite Ayn Rand's rejection of the mind-body dichotomy, it is well documented that Rand smoked heavily and, as mentioned in Barbara Branden's (1987) *The Passion of Ayn Rand*, expressed a personal antipathy towards physical fitness (5). As Objectivism matures into a systematic philosophy, it is critical that it not remain solely as an intellectual project. Accepting the Objectivist view of the internal relation between mind and body requires recognition of the fact that regular physical exercise is essential to a rational lifestyle.

That exercise has been scientifically proven to promote health is no longer in dispute. For many, personal fitness (whether in the form of aerobics or anaerobic weight lifting) has now become a religion. Fitness enthusiasts seek to maintain or improve their health and shape their bodies. In almost every gym, there exists a subculture of "bodybuilders." Within this subculture, there are individuals who seek to develop a Herculean physique that rivals the muscularity of the mythological Greek figure, "Hercules," or "Wolverine" in comic books, or Lou Ferrigno in the television series, "The Incredible Hulk." It is the idea of overpowering strength and the massive size these characters possess that the bodybuilding subculture finds attractive. Indeed, many professional bodybuilders pictured in such bodybuilding magazines as *Flex*, *Ironman*, and *MuscleMag International*, have achieved strength and size of terrific proportions. However, the successful bodybuilders featured in those magazines constitute but a fraction of the bodybuilding subculture.

Nonetheless, many aspiring bodybuilders who seek to physically improve themselves often do so to the detriment of developing their minds. Training routines found in muscle magazines and books often

conflict with one another, suggesting that there is no “best” or “precise” way to train. The dominating philosophy in bodybuilding is: “More is better.” Which often means: the more exercises one can do, the more sets one can do, the better chances of building stronger and larger muscles. Muscle magazines are also awash with advertisements for nutritional supplements that are marketed in ways that bait bodybuilders to try the next sure-fire way to get stronger and muscular.

Individuals new to the sport of bodybuilding will initially experience shock, wary of what exercise regime should be followed and what supplements to buy. They become enamored of large, glossy pictures in muscle magazines. Soon, they unquestioningly accept the gamut of training tips and supplement ads, and not much later, most will have deluded themselves into believing that the exercise regime they follow works for them in the hopes that five or ten years down the road a contest trophy awaits them. Indeed, many aspiring bodybuilders become so obsessed with “hitting the gym” and “eating right” that all other aspects in their lives are left unmet. The gym becomes life, an addiction. It is this deep obsession with one’s own muscles that became the substance of an intriguing book by a cultural anthropologist (Klein 1993).

One could say that capitalism is responsible for making bodybuilders confused. One could make the argument that all of these articles and advertisements in muscle magazines exist only in order to generate revenue. The authors and advertisers don’t care whether their readers make physical progress; they only care about turning a profit, making money from advertising training materials and nutritional supplements.

One could also argue that capitalism provided the Ayn Rand-influenced bodybuilding champion Mike Mentzer opportunities and a medium with which he could communicate his ideas to his readers, even if his ideas were radical and unpopular compared to his counterparts.

Born in Germantown and raised in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, Michael Jay Mentzer (b. 15 November 1951; d. 10 June 2001) was a bright student who often earned A’s and B’s in grade school. When

he was 11, Mentzer was inspired by a picture of Steve Reeves, star of such movies as “Hercules” and “Hercules Unchained,” and soon began training in the basement of his parents’ home (Snyder and Wayne 1987, 71). A bodybuilder was born. His younger brother Ray (b. 2 August 1953; d. 12 June 2001) soon followed suit, and the two frequently trained together.

After completing high school, Mike Mentzer served four years in the Air Force, and then enrolled at the University of Maryland (Mentzer, n.d.), before working for Nautilus, Inc. Despite many career changes, Mentzer continued to train and is best known for winning the 1976 Mr. America, 1978 Mr. Universe with a perfect score of 300, and placing fifth in the controversial 1980 Mr. Olympia contest.

In 1971, Mentzer met Arthur Jones, the man who would have the most significant impact on Mentzer’s thinking processes and bodybuilding training program. Mentzer learned from Jones that a set, properly performed to momentary muscular failure, is all that is required to stimulate muscular growth. Under Jones’s guidance, the Mentzer brothers progressed to a level of astonishing heights, pushing the limits of their genetic potential. Indeed, both became advocates of Jones’s bodybuilding principles, which suggested a radical departure from the conventional, multiple exercise-multiple set exercise regime the majority of bodybuilders blindly adopted. In the 1970s and 1980s, they trained no more than four days a week in high intensity fashion, each workout session lasting no more than one hour.

In due time, when Jones switched gears from bodybuilding to developing the revolutionary MedX cervical, lumbar, and knee rehabilitation exercise equipment, Mike Mentzer departed from Lake Helen, Florida, to train clients in Los Angeles, California. For some twelve years, between 1989 until his death, he trained bodybuilding stars Dorian Yates and Aaron Baker, motivational speaker Anthony Robbins, actor Gary Busey, and thousands of clients around the world. Over the years, Mentzer refined the theories originally developed by Jones.

A detailed discussion of the training principles advocated by

Jones and Mentzer is beyond the scope of the present paper. Suffice it to say, both agree that the conventional methods of training are counterproductive and that four major factors are required to stimulate muscular strength and size: 1) no more than one set is necessary per exercise, provided that the exercise is performed smoothly and the weight resistance is neither too heavy nor too light as to deter the trainee from “failing” to perform another repetition after eight to twelve repetitions; 2) each set should be performed to momentary muscular failure; 3) one or two exercises per body part are all that is necessary; and 4) workout schedules should not exceed two days a week. Whereas Arthur Jones called his bodybuilding theory, “The Nautilus Principles,” Mentzer called it “Heavy Duty.”

A unique bodybuilder and trainer, Mentzer published four books and numerous articles about the value of thinking and the necessity of philosophy in bodybuilding and in life. His writing is often straightforward, yet insightful:

Take the time to consider some of the deeper implications of the fact that man is an integrated unit of matter and consciousness, a being of mind and body. Take the time to learn something about the nature of thought and the importance of logic. Learn to read critically, i.e., seeking to distinguish between truth and falsehood. Don't make the same mistake I did in my late teens and early twenties—don't assume that simply because something is printed that it has to be true. (Mentzer, n.d.)

While he may have personally endorsed Objectivism earlier than 1987, Mentzer does not seem to have mentioned Ayn Rand or Objectivism in his writings until that time. An apparently patient man who respected his readers' beliefs, Mentzer did not look down on his readers who subscribed to a different philosophy or specific religion. Whatever philosophy, whatever religion one chooses, Mentzer tries to explain that science and logic exist within the realm of exercise, and anyone who chooses bodybuilding as a hobby can attain progress faster and more safely under a training regimen that is based on

science and logic. Mentzer argues that his own “Heavy Duty” approach meets those criteria.

Mentzer’s most advanced writing can be found in *Heavy Duty: Mind and Body*. Such chapter headings as “The Mind: Check Your Premises” and “Nature, To Be Commanded, Must Be Obeyed” illustrate how much influence Objectivism had on Mentzer. The philosophical and theoretical principles Mentzer expounds in *Mind and Body* are unlike those in any other bodybuilding book. Bodybuilding treatises do not discuss philosophy as a matter of course, but Mentzer (1996, 24–25) makes no apologies: “If you’re thinking this treatise is too intellectual, too professorial, and has no place in a bodybuilding book, check your premises. Bodybuilding does not exist in a vacuum, apart from the rest of life.” It is interesting to note that of the seven chapters in *Mind and Body*, three are exclusively on philosophy with no reference to specific exercises or training regimen. Mentzer does this for a reason; he tries to establish a foundation and argues that there is a Law of Identity and Law of Causality as regards medicine, the human body, and exercise science:

Most bodybuilders make a single mistake, a fundamental error, which is responsible for all their other mistakes: they fail to recognize the fact that bodybuilding is a part of exercise science, which flows from medical science. And that science is an exact—and an exacting—discipline which absolutely requires that man use a specific method of thought (logic) to gain precise knowledge of reality so he can successfully achieve his goals. (36)

Mind and Body is no ordinary bodybuilding book. It does not contain countless pictorials or endless exercise routines. What we find is something striking, something that is hinted in his earlier work, something no bodybuilder or Objectivist had ever done before: a thoughtful application of Objectivist metaphysics and epistemology to exercise. Moreover, we also find Mentzer persuading his audience to fulfill their overall human potential: readers are encouraged to apply reason and logic to bodybuilding, and to use bodybuilding as a

means to a further end, not as an end in itself. Mentzer writes: “It is only within the context of having properly developed your mind that you will be able to truly enjoy the achievement of your material values, including that of a more muscular body” (x).

Knowledgeable about Objectivism, and citing works by Ayn Rand, Leonard Peikoff, and Gary Hull, *Mind and Body* contains an accurate summary of Objectivism (28–30). It also contains brief discussions about the relationship between intelligence and self-esteem, between physical development, confidence, and pride. For instance, Mentzer writes:

An individual’s self-esteem stems from a sense of control over reality. Whenever we carry out a conscious effort, such as completing a record Bench Press, an A+ in school or writing a book, we feel a specific power rising, a sense of will. The abundant self-esteem associated with successful people flows from their having achieved goals by exerting the proper effort long range. People are not successful due to an accident of birth; they took the time and expended the necessary effort to develop their self-respect. They sufficiently value life and happiness to exert complete effort. As a result, they experience what Aristotle referred to as the “crown of all virtues”: Pride.

Working out in the gym, staying healthy, growing strong, and learning to appreciate one’s own physique in a rational manner are steps toward attaining a mind-body union. Exercise, then, is not an end in itself. Contrary to those who are obsessed with exercise and bodybuilding, and unlike bodybuilders who find happiness in the gym, Mentzer sees differently. Asked in an interview what makes him happy, Mentzer said: “I find considerable delight in dealing with abstract, philosophical, theoretical knowledge. That makes me happy. The resolute use of my mind is what makes me happy, and that should be what makes anyone happy. That should be their central concern and interest. It should be their highest value, that which makes them the most happy!” (The Sandwich 2001, 205).

The impact Mentzer has had on fitness enthusiasts and bodybuilders around the world is immeasurable. Mentzer's website, which consists of bodybuilding tips and expositions of Objectivist philosophy, is linked from hundreds of websites. Equally remarkable, Mentzer's endorsement of Objectivism attracted the attention of the Ayn Rand Institute (ARI) and The Objectivist Center (TOC). Andrew Bernstein of ARI published his essay, "The Philosophical Foundations of Heroism," on Mentzer's website. And in the summer of 2002, TOC sponsored a course in exercise and nutrition science given by Brian D. Johnston and Wendy Chokan, both of whom are directly influenced by Mentzer's bodybuilding theories.

Given that Rand was a habitual smoker who avoided exercise, it is interesting to witness two Objectivist organizations bringing Mentzer's bodybuilding theories to the fore—encouraging Objectivists to adopt a rational fitness program—and forging a closer relationship between mind and body. This is Mike Mentzer's legacy, and another indication of Ayn Rand's growing influence.

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