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# The Philosopher's Stone

Philosophical Discussion Group, Armstrong State University

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# THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

## Immortality through Legacy

By Christopher Davis  
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I do not consider death to be a complete end. The end of physical existence, perhaps, but not a complete end. When dealing with a topic such as death, many consider it to be a finality; the last chapter of someone's book, so to speak. Ultimately, I accept death as inevitable. Some of us may dread it, some of us may ignore it for as long as possible, and some of us may prepare for it. However, our created legacy subsists through the end of our physical existence. All of us create a legacy whether intentionally or unintentionally, and beyond that, we carry the legacy of others. This process repeats ad infinitum, our legacies ever expanding. For example, the philosophy of dualism did not begin, nor did it end with Descartes, though we certainly do credit it to his legacy. While Plato and Aristotle may have been documented as some of the first to play with the idea, who's to say how much further back it went, and for how much longer it will continue?

This concept of legacy is typically defined as "what we leave behind" when we die. However, I would argue that our own legacy is not what we leave behind, but rather what we add to it. Our legacy does not have a starting or stopping point, it continues on through time being altered dynamically by our values and goals. In this regard, would death really be considered "the last chapter" in an individual's book or their own addition to the whole "book" of history itself?

To give an example of what I mean by legacy, let's talk about Martin Heidegger. Heidegger is influential in the field of philosophy because of his work in *Being and Time*, and his existentialist ideas. We study *Being and Time* and his work because of his thought-provoking (if confusing) ideas on Being (which he calls Dasein) and existence. However, what is less talked about (or more, depending on who you ask) is Heidegger's Nazi connections. Indeed, Heidegger was elected as rector of the University of Freiburg after his mentor, Husserl, was forced to step down because he was a Jewish professor. This was of course after Husserl had helped Heidegger get into that position in the first place. Shortly after becoming rector, he joined the Nazi Party.

We do not talk about his involvement with the Nazi Party and his treatment of his mentor, Husserl, nearly as much as we discuss his philosophical ideas. The reason

behind this is due to the legacy he added to, based on his values and ideas as a philosopher. In this sense, Heidegger being an asshole is irrelevant to us because of what we look at of his legacy. We look at, and remember, what his values and ideas were. This is what his legacy is to us.

Further, while Heidegger may be physically deceased, can we really consider him to be "dead" when we still discuss his ideas and values on a regular basis? I would argue that to consider someone to be truly dead, then they would necessarily need to be erased from time entirely. We would no longer remember, nor would we discuss a person erased from time. The mere fact that I can say the word Dasein and have it connected to Heidegger means that he still exists, because of the legacy he added, and a legacy which continues to grow. The essence of Heidegger is, and will continue to be, present because of the legacy developed.

All of us are "known for" something. When we are described by someone, we are typically given certain qualities that are unique to our legacy and will largely continue to be as such throughout time. I had made a short film with my friend some years ago called "Potato" and people I had never met before have seen this film and to them I am known as "Potato Guy". That is a part of my legacy and my essence, largely unaffected by my state of being alive. I do not have to be physically present for me to have the quality of "Potato Guy". The awareness of my legacy will obviously differ from person to person, but the qualities of my legacy do not change. I could just be son of Jim, or the guy who chews his fingernails, or that guy who drives a Camaro, etc. All of these are parts of my legacy.

How I describe myself is irrelevant to my own legacy, it is solely dependent on what others attribute to me, or it is unlikely that it will be remembered at all. However, my actions and thoughts are affected by my values, goals, and my over-arching idea of what I would like to pass on or give to society. Due to this behavior, even someone that has never heard of me before will in some capacity know of my legacy via what others have gained or perceived from my actions, values, goals, and/or ideas.

As a whole, death does not end an individual's existence. Goals and values attributed to the individual will continue to exist, as will ideals that were added to that particular legacy. The legacy will have certain bits and pieces remembered by various other individuals, but in order for a person to truly no longer exist, they must have no legacy at all. It is my belief that being completely forgotten is an

exceedingly difficult task, especially in today's society. Therefore, an individual's existence should not be solely tied to a physical state.

## **Book Review: How to Die (and Live to Die) Like a Philosopher**

By Melissa Bates  
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I think we can all agree that studying philosophy can sometimes feel like an endless journey of theories, arguments, and downright nonsense – and we forget that these were real human beings that are now dead. Did they die in the same manner as their beliefs? That question and many others are posed and analyzed in Simon Crichtley's *The Book of Dead Philosophers*. Crichtley dishes the death dirt on what he calls his top “190 or so philosophers” – which I might say is a proud mix of Western, Middle Eastern, Indian, and Chinese notables - quite of few which are women – Yes! Crichtley writes with authority on the content but brilliantly injects a humorous slap-stick sarcasm to heighten the absurdity of some of the lives and deaths of these folks. If he wasn't such a successful philosopher I would beg him to get a stand-up gig, HBO special, something! He is that funny. Joking aside, I appreciated his candor in the introduction where he explains the driving force that inspired him to write this book, namely the Socratic belief that philosophy is an exercise in dying. Additionally, he intimately shares his thought process, how he conducted the research, and some of the failures he encountered while writing this book. In my opinion, I thought he also did a very good job of emphasizing which are “alleged” stories told through the ages or gleaned from other philosophers' texts that have survived.

I'll tell you right now, I have a deeper respect for some of these philosophers simply because they died in epic fashion. For instance: Did you know that Empedocles threw himself into a volcano to prove his immortality (the story behind this is bananas)? How about Zeno of Elea (yeah, the one that kicked it with Parmenides, not the Stoic) who went out Mike Tyson-style by biting the ear of a tyrant thus getting stabbed to death because he wouldn't let go? Some died heroically, some in the throes of passion, some by terrible disease, some flew the cuckoo's nest (on the real, philosophy can do that to you), and some died peacefully in their beds (or desks with their head in Descartes). But this book isn't just about death – it's about how to live and die as a philosopher or more rightly, a human being. Specifically, how we as individuals should properly regard death without fear and those that led by example. How death ought to be regarded is a major discussion in philosophy – and Crichtley does an extraordinary job of covering the gamut. Views on the afterlife, reincarnation, the soul, nirvana and nothingness can be found throughout this book. There is a huge dose of history of philosophy – delivered in a very down-to earth,

easy to grasp prose. He tosses in a few political/social barbs where it fits. I liked the way he ordered the content in chronological order so you can easily jump around different eras of thought and find the particular philosopher(s) you are most curious about.

At any rate, regardless if you are just moonlighting to fulfill a core requirement or a chosen disciple of the fully examined life, you will find something useful and entertaining in between these pages. I totally recommend this book!

### OUR NEXT PDG MEETING

**Oct. 17 @ Noon in Gamble 226**

What Will Your Legacy Be?

Is thinking about legacy a form of living to die?

Is practicing for dying and death needed for living and life?

“The one aim of those who practice philosophy in the proper manner is to practice for dying and death.”

--- Plato in the *Phaedo* (64a)

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Spring 2015 Courses

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**PHIL 3130 Rationalism and Empiricism**

**PHIL 3340 Symbolic Logic**

**LIST 3000 History of Liberal Studies**

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2014.aspx](http://www.eliewieselselfoundation.org/contest2014.aspx)

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