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The Philosopher's Stone

Philosophical Discussion Group, Armstrong State University

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The Newsletter of AASU’s Philosophical Discussion Group

*Please join us for philosophical pursuit of the human condition.
We will meet in Gamble Hall 106 on Thursday, February 27 at 3:30 pm.*

Pursuits of the Human Condition

By Jonathan Hatcher

Jean-Paul Sartre described the human condition as “le pour-soi” or “the for-itself.” A being-for-itself is constantly striving, always in pursuit. A pursuit is the act of moving towards a goal or object. Since it is the human condition to be in pursuit, human beings are defined by their pursuits. What of the conditions of these pursuits? How can these pursuits be described or interpreted? Surely understanding the conditions of the human condition is a worthwhile endeavor. Throughout my encounters with philosophy I have come to recognize the importance of necessity and permanence as qualities of human pursuits. Considering this, I set out to categorize pursuits based on these two characteristics.

	Temporally Bounded	Eternal
Necessary	<u>Essential Pursuits</u> -sustenance	<u>Intuitive Pursuits</u> -perfection
Non-necessary	<u>Selective Pursuits</u> -money	<u>Purposeful Pursuits</u> -knowledge

Some pursuits are directed towards temporally bounded objects, or objects that exist within a constraint of time. To put it simply, a temporally bounded object is something that has a beginning and an end. Some of these pursuits which are directed towards temporally bounded objects are necessary, meaning that these pursuits are shared by all human beings. Should

one not participate in these pursuits, one’s humanity is called into question. Necessary pursuits of temporal objects shall be called essential pursuits. An example of essential desire is sustenance. All human beings require sustenance. Sustenance is the procurement and consumption of matter. Matter is temporal, so any processes that rely on the existence of matter are also temporal. This means the pursuit of sustenance is a temporally bounded pursuit, but it is also a necessary pursuit. For without sustenance a human being will die and no longer be human.

Not all pursuits of temporally bounded objects are necessary. We often pursue things that are bound in time, but not all of these pursuits define us as humans. These pursuits are non-necessary, meaning it is possible to participate in these pursuits but not required for one’s humanity. These pursuits shall be called selective pursuits and could be considered the most recognized forms of pursuit nowadays. Selective pursuits appear to have the widest range of manifestations. Noble acts such as fighting and dying for one’s country fit in this category. Someone dying for his/her country is dying for a temporally bounded object, namely a country. As any comparison of maps throughout historical periods will tell you, countries come and go. Hence they are temporally bounded. Other examples of selective pursuits include greed, perversion, a diploma, or your morning coffee.

The next two categories of pursuit deal with eternal objects. Eternal objects have no beginning and no end. Such objects are immaterial and often lead to metaphysical discussions which are difficult.

The necessary pursuits of eternal objects are intuitive pursuits. The object of these pursuits is perfection. Perfection is our notion that there is a possible maximum of good. The pursuit to be better is shared by all of humanity, but the meaning of the word good is unclear to us. This indistinct nature of good makes intuitive pursuits very complex. We cannot simply see our goal and head towards it; hence, we have to rely on natural feelings to point us in the general direction of that goal. Guilt is one of those natural

feelings. When we feel guilty about a decision, we realize that there was a better option and keep that better option in mind for the next time a similar moment of

decision presents itself. This remembrance allows us to make the better choice, making us a better human.

Non-necessary pursuits of eternal objects shall be called purposeful pursuits. The object of purposeful pursuits is knowledge. Knowledge is made up of claims that coincide with truth and truth is eternal. Claims that do not coincide with truth are opinions and we all know that opinions change making them temporally bounded. Although the pursuit of knowledge is highly regarded, it is non-necessary. If we consider knowledge as something that defines us as humans, then we open up the potential to say that those

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with mental disabilities are not human. Denouncing the humanity of the mentally disabled is both a morally bad idea and observably false.

Now that we have four categories of pursuits, which pursuits are more beneficial to us? Since essential and intuitive pursuits are necessary, we do not get a choice on those two. Selective and purposeful pursuits on the other hand allow us some freedom of choice. Since essential pursuits are easily achieved and intuitive pursuits do not have a clear goal, humans will inevitably reach a point in their life where they must choose a non-necessary pursuit. This means that we must choose to pursue either a selective pursuit or a purposeful pursuit. This instant of having to choose is called the Problem of Chosen Pursuit.

To understand which choice is better for the problem of chosen pursuit, we need to see what the outcome would be for each option. We know that selective pursuits are temporally bounded. The fact that such pursuits have an end means that we can acquire these goals, unless death intervenes. What happens when these goals are reached? When the goal is reached, your pursuit is over. Once the pursuit is over, you again have to find another pursuit. Consequently, once your goal is reached, you are forced back into the problem of chosen pursuit. Should you continue to choose selective pursuits, your life would be a constantly repeating cycle of choice, acquirement, and problem of chosen pursuit.

Our second option is to choose a purposeful pursuit. Purposeful pursuits are eternal because there is no end to knowledge. Since there is no end, it is not possible to acquire the goal. This means that purposeful pursuits do not end. Since the pursuit does not end, one would never have to choose another pursuit. By not having to choose another pursuit, you could completely avoid the problem of chosen pursuit. However, since both purposeful and selective pursuits are non-necessary, you can choose to stop participating in these pursuits at any

time. In fact, sometimes you will have to give up these pursuits for the sake of necessary pursuits. Ultimately by choosing a purposeful pursuit, one is never forced into the problem of chosen pursuit, but may elect to temporarily cease said pursuit.

Purposeful pursuits seem to offer more consistency in one's life while selective pursuits offer the possibility of achieving goals. I cannot explicitly say which choice is better. I pose a few questions for consideration: Which option will you choose when presented with the problem of chosen pursuit? Why? Where does morality fall in this charting of pursuits? Where would your conception of love fall in these categories of pursuits? Does your idea of a human soul coincide with the claims in this article? What do you find wrong with this article? Will you engage in this non-necessary pursuit with me?

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