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# The Philosopher's Stone

Philosophical Discussion Group, Armstrong State University

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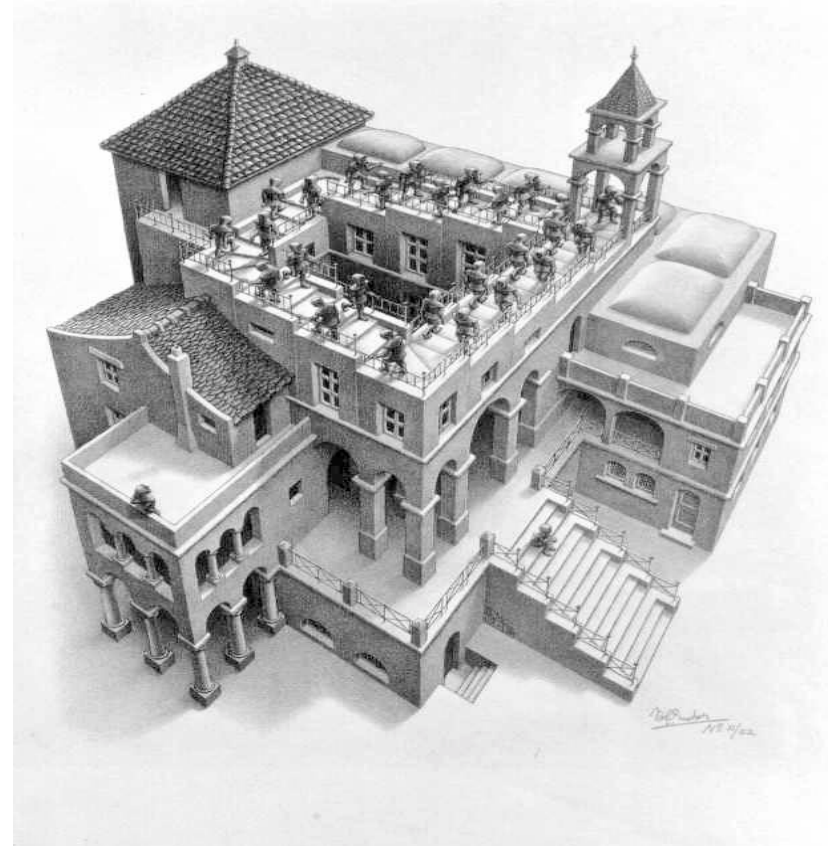
# THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

The Newsletter of the Philosophical Debate Group

## Friedrich Nietzsche's Eternal Return of the Same

by Gregory Vaughn

How would you respond if someone were to tell you that all that has already occurred in your life and all that is occurring at this very second in time, and all that is to come will happen again? Moreover, what if all that has taken place in the past up to this moment and all that will occur in your life will be repeated in exactly the same fashion an infinite number of times? Sound like an X-Files episode? Well, it's not; you have just been introduced to Friedrich Nietzsche's "Eternal Return of the Same." Accepting this idea of never-ending cycles of one's life, according to Nietzsche, is necessary for an individual to truly affirm life. Nietzsche's denial of the attitudes of those people within society whom he affectionately referred to as the "herd" (the masses) and their concentration on the afterlife and other worldliness, in his mind, were the great destroyers of the true affirmation of life. For Nietzsche, the concept of an afterlife and another world were impossible concepts to grasp because if there were to be another life it would necessarily be this one. The Eternal Return of the Same is such that our lives would be exactly the same,



on exactly the same planet and would consist of every miniscule, horrible, and excruciating detail. It's a hard pill to swallow for most, but according to Nietzsche, if one truly loves and affirms this life then the eternal return makes perfect sense. The eternal return challenges us to ask ourselves, "do I love my life so much that I am willing to live it over and over repeatedly – an infinite number of times, and am I willing to embrace the same events occurring in exactly the same fashion, including my most terrible moments?"

## The Heaviest Thought

from Friedrich Nietzsche's  
*The Gay Science*, section 341

*The Greatest Weight* – What if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: "This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more: and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence – even this spider and this moonlight between the trees,

and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!"

Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: "You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine." If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you. The question in each and every thing. "Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?" would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to crave nothing more fervently than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?

## **The Path to the Abyss and Eternal Recurrence**

On April 25, Dr. Nordenhaug will give a talk on Nietzsche's view of history and this idea of the Eternal Recurrence. After his lecture, the Philosophical Debate Group will look deeper into this abysmal idea. He has written the following introduction to his lecture.

"In part one of my talk, I shall offer a general overview of the history of philosophy from a Nietzschean perspective.

In part two, I shall focus on Nietzsche's idea of the Eternal Recurrence and its relation to the abyss of nihilism. An understanding of Nietzsche's perspective can offer valuable insight to anyone who feels that a current of nihilism flows through modern society.

For some, the question of whether our culture has seen

**Last PDG meeting of the semester:**

**April 25, 2000  
(Tuesday)**

**Nietzsche Lecture  
& Discussion**

**Gamble 213 @ 7:00**

its fabricated foundations and whether it is overrun with nihilism are highly debatable. I do not seek to settle that debate because Nietzsche's assumption and mine will be that modern culture is nihilistic and presently struggling with the consequences of a nihilistic worldview. The question of whether modern culture is nihilistic and decadent was not an issue for Nietzsche.

On the premise that modern culture is fundamentally nihilistic, he sought both to affirm life in the midst of this cultural nihilism and to give an account of how the culture came to be so decadent. On that same premise, we too shall explore the path of thinking which has led us to the present cultural abyss and the means by which we, as individuals, might attempt to live in such an abyss.

## **The Previous Meeting: A Synopsis of "History, Philosophy, and the Search for Truth"**

*by Joe Weaver*

In "History and Truth," Paul Ricoeur claims that the objectivity that is proper to the historian's discipline has a necessarily subjective compo-

nent. This component is made up of four elements: (1) historical choice, (2) an expanded notion of causality, (3) the notion of conceptual distance, and (4) a realization of the specific nature of the subject matter.

The philosopher's use of the historian's history has traditionally taken one of two forms. Philosophers either attempt to understand acts of consciousness as The Philosophy of History or as The History of Philosophy. The former approach can lead to an unwavering dogmatism and heralds the end of history. The latter can lead to radical skepticism and truth without belief.

To overcome both weaknesses, Ricoeur suggests a change in the manner in which we understand 'truth.' In Ricoeur's proposal, 'truth' is understood as a way of being in the world instead of something that we can possess.

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