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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 Discussion Group

In Honor of Nothing

By Chris Dunn

Nothing. A void in the heart of being. What can be said about nothing? Well, nothing...but then again, perhaps there is too much to say about nothing. As a young freshman, I knew. I knew and I was going to set these pompous academicians straight. I remember the first day of my Introduction to Philosophy class. Dr. Nordenhaug entered, slapped his books down, and without a moment's delay began the lecture. Philosophy, he informed the class, is first and foremost a love. It is the love of wisdom. "Well, that sounds reasonable," I thought to myself. He then gave us definitions of the different branches of philosophy and the normal stuff that any introductory class contains. I furiously scribbled down my notes dotting every i, for fear that if I miss something I might not get a good grade, the bane of every good student. Nordenhaug then said something that took me off guard, according to the Bible, God created the world *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. The nerve of this man, to utter such a ridiculous notion. I immediately rebutted, "That is ridiculous, God created the world from himself." "No", he pointed out, "the original language indicates that creation was from nothing." I went back and checked that afternoon and of course he was right. This would be the first of my many encounters with nothing.

On many occasions as I read over my philosophy texts, I would have a moment of insight. "Nordenhaug may have been right about 'X' but I've got it all figured out now." I marched into his office and begin to tell him my newly begotten

knowledge. But never did I get more than two or three words into uttering my revelation when he pointed out the smudges of grease all over what was just moments ago my perfectly clear window pane of reality. The more I grasped at it, the more I spread the grease around. Before I knew what was happening, Crash! It slipped from my grasp and shattered into a myriad of fading sparkles spread across the office floor. Nordenhaug leaned over his desk to observe the remnants of the once solid pane. "Well," he uttered with a grin on his face, "any other questions?" "No." I slowly left his office, too distraught to continue. Before I entered the office door at the far end of the narrow hall in Gamble, the world was bright and sunny. But as I left, the world was dark and wrought with deep shadow. My steps caused ripples to emanate through the ground. The nameless, shapeless floor rose up and engulfed all form and direction. Like viscous ink, it flowed upward, covering everything in my field of vision, before consuming, surrounding, choking me, infiltrating every crevasse of my mind until there was no mind, no questioner, no thing; nothing.

After the Introduction, I took Twentieth Century Philosophy with Nordenhaug. We read Sartre's "Being and Nothingness". Consciousness, Nordenhaug informed the class is "a being such that in its being, its being is in question in so far as this being implies a being other than itself." Oh, well that makes perfect sense. "What this means," he continued, "is that consciousness is always consciousness of, thus is nothing without the thing which it is of. This being the case, the statement 'I am I' is impossible because the first 'I' objectifies the latter 'I' and thus the first 'I' is not the object which it is of, thus the 'I' is not

the 'I'. Therefore, there is a void in the heart of conscious being. I am not I, I am nothing."

Nothing. Does not the word imply a total lack of characteristics? If Nordenhaug is nothing, how then can nothing possess so much wisdom and so much honor? Does nothing love the individual human soul? Does nothing have the patience and understanding to put up with the chore of endless bureaucratic paperwork, the indifference of the average student, and the condemnation by the rare student who actually thinks about what is being taught? Yet still finding the time to spend afternoons and non-office hours answering the inquiries of a desperate student with too many questions? Nothing, which lacks all characteristics, has more character than any *thing* in my experience. Thus if Nordenhaug claims to be nothing then I proudly, yet in utter despair, acknowledge my own nothingness as would anyone who has had the privilege of knowing and being taught by *nothing*.

If you have any questions, criticisms, or comments, please contact either Chris Dunn or Dr. Nordenhaug. Anyone interested in writing a brief article for *The Philosopher's Stone*, please contact either of us (it doesn't have to be good, however it does have to be thoughtful).

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