

1996

# The Philosopher's Stone

Philosophical Discussion Group, Armstrong State University

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## Recommended Citation

Philosophical Discussion Group, Armstrong State University, "The Philosopher's Stone" (1996). *The Philosopher's Stone*. 40.  
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Volume 1 Number 1

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The Newsletter of The Philosophical Debate

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The philosophical Debate group will meet on Monday, March 4th, at 3:00 pm. in Gamble Hall, room 103. Everyone is invited to join our discussion; bring your own ideas and/or literature that you have read about the topics we are discussing. If you are unsure about the issues, but would like to learn more or have questions about the issues, please come sit in on our discussions. Our purpose is to gain insight into current issues in Philosophy, to provide an informal discussion of our ideas, and to learn from one another.

If you cannot attend our discussions, but would like us to address a particular question, you can contact us through the Learning Support Office or e-mail us at [nordener@pirates.armstrong.edu](mailto:nordener@pirates.armstrong.edu). We will be glad to publish some of your questions and our responses in the Newsletter.

## The Current Topic

Our current topic is *Ethics and Technology*: what are our responsibilities as rational beings? Where does the responsibility of the individual reach its limit and the responsibility of society to enforce morality take over? Does society have that responsibility? Do we think about what we are doing before we do it, or do we simply act out of greed? As technology seems as dualistic as society itself, is there a way to, or does it even make sense to, try and force the good to outweigh the bad? Who is the master, the people or the machines. . .?

Some of the specific issues include Artificial Intelligence, pornography on the Internet, the ethical implications of the encryption debate. Some suggested readings are [Neil Postman's Technopoly](#) and [Jaques Ellul's The Technological Bluff](#). One of the members brought a chapter from a book by Ellul to last week's meeting. If you would like a copy of this, please contact Tiffanie Rogers in the Learning Support Office.

## Highlights from the last meeting. . .

Originally attached to the Telecommunications bill was a section about the [Clipper chip](#), which would be the only legal form of encryption for computer communications. The justification was that the government wanted to be able to monitor illegal activities. Although this bill did not pass, it raises questions about how far the government's rights go in limiting the privacy of citizens. There is concern about how much the advancement of technology will enable the government to monitor the activity of private citizens: the big brother syndrome. There are already cameras in public places through which people can monitor the weather over the Internet, or through which private citizens can be watched. There are also cameras in public places which are there to prevent crime, but some people feel threatened by other ways in which they might be used.

Everything that is invented has both good and bad applications. The implications of a particular development are often not weighed against the possibility of monetary gain and other seemingly important immediate benefits until it is too late; once a development is made, there is no turning back. A question was raised about how far we *should* go with technology; just because we know that we have the capability to do something, should we? But even if someone does see inevitable negative outcomes from a particular development, should or could they stop it from being developed? If they could and did stop it, would it be only a temporary delay? Perhaps in a larger picture it would not be ethical for that person to intervene with the development because someone else might certainly come along and develop it later.

Many people say that when the atomic bomb was being developed the people working on the project had no idea about the purpose of what they were doing. [Richard Rhodes](#), in his definitive work, The Making of the Atomic Bomb, argues that the scientists working on the project did know what it would do, but maybe not how it would be used. The workers may have been kept totally in the dark. Perhaps the scientists did know more than we would like to believe, however, they may not have had much choice. They knew that Germany and Russia were developing the same technology; it was just a matter of who was able to complete the project first.

There is also concern over whether technology is running out of human control. Although individuals may be aware of the ethical implications of a development, are the cultures as a unit unable to think beyond the capitalistic prospects of money and power? One of the questions raised was the development of [Artificial Intelligence](#); machines capable of thinking, but with no concept of right

and wrong. In this, we might have to wonder. . .how much like us will they be?

**Don't Forget About the Meeting on March 4th!**

## ***Announcements***

Spring Quarter

Introduction to Contemporary Moral Issues

Phil 251-01/ 1:30 - 3:40 pm (T/Th)

A study of the principal ethical traditions of Western Culture and their application of historic perspectives to contemporary moral issues in medicine, business, and environmental relations.