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The Philosopher's Stone

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Know Thyself

Philosophical Discussion Group, Armstrong State University

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The Philosopher's Stone

The Newsletter of The Philosophical Debate

Γνῶθι Σεαυτὸν. (Know Thyself)

(Inscription on the temple of Apollo at Delphi)

Some Things to Consider. . .

What constitutes a self? Does material being necessitate the presence of a Self, or must the being be aware of its existence as a Self in order to be a Self? Does your environment influence who you are, and if so, to what degree? How much of what you are is within your control and how much is determined? Do you think that the original man, or man when he first became self-conscious, perceived the Self in the same way that we do? Is how we describe or perceive our Selves influenced by or dependent on what we define as human nature? What is human nature? Is the Self a unity that maintains itself over time? Are you the same self today that you were yesterday? Why do we worry about what we look like to others? Why does it often seem that others can see us better than we can see ourselves?

Highlights from the last meeting. . .

According to the American Heritage Dictionary, the self is "The total being of one person; the individual." But what are the constituent parts of this total being, and by what criteria do we define ourselves as individuals? At our last meeting we explored many different perspectives and possibilities concerning these and other questions. Is it possible to be a self without being self-aware, or is self reflection a necessary requisite? According to [Hegel](#), the reflective self is not a self; the original self is unreflective.

If reflection on the self is needed to be a self, doesn't that imply that the self is other than the self, as the perceiver and the perceived cannot be one in the same? [William James](#), a radical [Empiricist](#), argued on this basis that there is no consciousness and

that, in asserting that there is a consciousness which is aware of the self-- sorry [Occam](#)--we are multiplying ourselves unnecessarily. Contrary to [Immanuel Kant](#), who said that the consciousness is a transcendental unity of our perceptions, James asserts that the self in itself is the constancy of our experiences. Do we really think of ourselves as a unity, or do we perceive several disparate selves within our selves, each facet being a mask which we wear in different situations? Are you the same self in the work place that you are when you are out with friends or home with family? By what constant characteristics can we identify a unity? Our different roles are masks that we wear; they are the parts of our selves which we allow others to see. What is the importance of the masks, how are they shaped by particular circumstances, and why do we worry about how we appear to others? How much of what is behind those masks shows through? Why does it often seem that though we are with ourselves all of our lives, someone who has been with us for a short period of time might have an insight into our character and discover something about which we were unaware? Is it that the familiarity of ourselves clouds our perception?

How the self is perceived changes over time. According to [Karl Marx](#), the self is a relation of the individual to the social being. This is similar to the ancient Greek notion of the self, where the self was perceived as an integral part of a larger social whole. Today if someone were to run from a battle we might say that they did so for self interest or preservation; according to Homeric values such an action would not be out of a sense of self, but a lack thereof.

In the Medieval period, the self was perceived as a relation with God. [Rene Descartes](#) marks the beginning of the perception of the self as an independent entity. Is the reality of the self actually altered by these changes in perception over time? [Walker Percy](#) asks how we can know so much about quasars and black holes, but so little about ourselves.

Next Meeting

Wednesday, January 22

8:30pm

Lane Library, Room 206

Our Topic is a special challenge from Carol. We will be exploring perspectives on questions such as, What is education? What is the dominant social view of education and how does this affect what it means to be a student or a teacher? Is education valuable in itself, or is it solely used to reach some other goal? If education is only a means, how do we define what it means to be educated?

What is Education?

By: Carol Linskey

"One of the greatest problems in education is, how can subjection to the lawful constraint be combined with the ability to make use of one's freedom?"

-Immanuel Kant

A college education is a highly sought after goal within our society. A college education usually means, for the most part, that you can get a good job with a degree. Perhaps this is one of the "rights, privileges, and honors appertaining thereto. . .," yet I believe it is but one of those explicit rights. When I am affronted with the question, "What are you going to do with your degree?" I find I react somewhat defensively. Without a "telos," or goal, the six years I spent agonizing over algebra and celebrating Erasmus have become to the society I live in useless and a waste. Certainly, I agree that a materially satisfactory life is implicit in the "American Dream," but should we sacrifice all her members' talents towards this material test of what it means to be a good member of society? Is education a function that serves to produce like members, or is it a jumping off place from which a member can change society itself, Improving it by providing an environment whereby the "pursuit of happiness" upon which all our constitutional ideals are founded can be realized?

From the onset of the institutionalization of American education, formers and reformers have struggled with the tension between action and experience, theory and practice, and teaching and learning. Always to be kept in mind is the well-being of the youth it seeks to serve. While it is necessary to have a structure with some constraint, (implicit in the idea of a structure), I also believe it is as necessary to invest some faith in education for its own sake. To allow some room for teachers to teach and students to learn how to think, following the old adage, give a man a fish, he'll eat for a day, teach him how to fish, and he'll eat forever." In this thought I believe lies the answer to the expressed fear over whether or not our educational system, by limiting itself to the demands of the job market, will make itself obsolete through the unavoidable promotion of technology, or whether it will adapt in such a way as to continue to offer to a student something fundamentally implicit in what it means to be "educated."

From here on I have many more questions than answers for those entrusted with ensuring the survival of the means toward education, but I would like to stress to those who carry the burden not to forget who education is meant to enrich, the human individual.

*If there is a topic that you would like to propose for discussion, or if you have an article or letter that you would like to submit to **The Philosopher's Stone**, our submission box is located in the Writing Center in Gamble Hall.*

Special Announcements

ESSAY CONTEST: The deadline for our essay contest is March 27th. Essays must be a minimum of 1,000 words and focus on a philosopher or some topic in Philosophy. Essays may be submitted in the Thought Box in the Writing Center.

On January 30th at 12:15, Dr. Nordenhaug will be giving a faculty lecture in Ashmore Hall Auditorium: "Reflections on Aristotle, Bureaucracy, and Terrorism: Where has all the Virtue Gone?" Everyone is invited to attend!!