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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

What Is on the Other Side of Nothing?

Some things to consider. . .

On what basis do we place value on objects? On people? Is self-gratification the basis for value? If so, how do we view [altruism](#)? Is there a difference between perceived self-interest and actual self interest? Are your values determined by culture? What is freedom? Is it something external, having to do with rules and regulations, something internal, or some balance of the two?

Highlights from the last meeting. . .

[Ayn Rand](#) says that living things attribute value to things that help them live and grow. Can there be a sense of false value; a short-sightedness which allows us only to see a limited time into the future, which means that we may think that something is in our self-interest, but find out later that it was not? Self-interest on the social level has a larger scope. For [Marx](#), the social interest would take precedent, and the values are culturally dictated through the superstructure. When we think of self interest, what is the scope that we afford to it? Ultimately, do we consider whether what is good for us is also good for others? For the community? Is it possible to go after your own self-interest independent of others?

Value of objects and acquisition entails a cycle of consumption in which each particular gratification is only temporary and is soon replaced by a new want or desire. Is there a way, using reason, to determine what is really in our self-interest; can we see through the illusion? Or is it perhaps that the perceived self-interest is the only one? If in hindsight one acknowledges a mistake, and makes an objective statement about having been wrong, then even if the feeling of enjoyment was real, it was based on an illusion. How do you tell the difference between a serious commitment that you make to something and one that you make based only on feelings, which we are unable to sustain indefinitely? Then again, why is it necessary to look for something

permanent? Is that what people are looking for? [Nietzsche](#) would say that value and self-interest are irrelevant, and that only the moment is important. But where do we go from there? What is on the other side of nothing?

Is there a difference between natural and artificial values? I.E., are our values part of our nature, or are they generated by society, or is it a little of both? How much of what we want is controlled by marketing? If our perceived needs are wants that amount to exaggerations of actual needs, then is our value system based on greed? If seeking self-gratification is in our nature, then it is not possible to act contrary to it. In [Freud](#)'s terms, the Ego and the Superego channel and restrain the Id, but cannot put desires into it. The consequence of believing that value is in our nature is the sacrifice of freedom; it becomes a determinism. Are there any acts which are really against self-interest? [David Hume](#) says that there is evidence in Nature of animals sacrificing themselves for other animals. For example, in the phenomenon of kin selection, animals who are related are likely to put themselves in danger to warn the others of danger. Bees will sacrifice themselves for their queen. Is there, then, also something in humans that makes them able to act against their own self-interest?

If we can act against our self-interest, and if it is our nature to act in self-interest, then do we have the ability to change our human nature? What is human nature? Is it rooted in the ability to make choices? If we say that with consciousness and the ability to choose we are able to alter our human nature, then it was not really human nature, as human nature is defined as something which is constant in the nature of all humans. What is self-gratification?

What is the difference between self-gratification and self-interest? Which is more important? What do we make of the person who is bent on destruction even knowing that he will be destroyed in the process, E.G., terrorists? For whom would you sacrifice yourself? By what criteria do we determine what value to place on other people's lives? By their contribution, e.g., by their expected life span, or amount of time that we can expect them to contribute to society (young vs. old), or is there some way to value a person for who they are in themselves? If we think of others as a means, we are inadvertently devaluing ourselves with the understanding that we are then means for others.

In dealing with things and values, we value what we choose over what is chosen for us. Is it possible that choice and determination can be valued as two components of a whole without one being accentuated over the other? How did the notion of freedom come up? Were we free until someone said that we were not? Feeling that we are not free must begin with the realization that we are restricted from something. The idea of freedom will not come from the natural world. Being a part of the natural world, we are determined by its laws. How does a person with no idea of freedom get the idea?

Imagination has limits; it cannot come up with whatever it wishes. Does this imply that there is something beyond nature which put this idea into us? The first notions of freedom over and beyond the natural come from the Judea-Christians. There had previously been societies with rules, but no idea of freedom. If the notion of freedom was a necessary development of mankind, then why did it only come up in this isolated setting? What were the conditions in this place and time that were favorable for its emergence?

Next Meeting

Wednesday, February 19, 8:30 pm
Gamble Hall, room 106

Our topic: What is Chaos?

Contemplating Chaos

By: William Murphy

Consider [Chaos](#). No, not the orientation given for incoming freshmen. What is Chaos? What is Chaos theory? Do they have any philosophical implications? Do they explain anything about breakdowns in communication, such as discussions, arguments, or compromises? Do they explain anything about the demises of civilizations such as in the dark ages; mass extinctions as with the dinosaurs; or with asteroids colliding with Earth? What about the willfulness of people who disobey laws at a time when laws are proliferating, that is, the proliferation of laws when people are lawless? Wouldn't it be interesting if we unanimously agreed on chaos, and could that be an example of chaos if it happens?

If you are interested in reading more about this topic before the meeting, we have two articles on reserve in the library.

Special Announcements

Philosophy classes for Spring quarter:

Phi 311: Ancient Philosophy

Phi 251: Intro. to Ethics and

Contemporary moral issues

The Philosophical Essay Contest

- *Essays must focus on a philosopher or some philosophical topic
- *Each essay must be a minimum of 1,000 words and include your name and phone number to be eligible.
- *Awards will be given for first, second, and third place winners

Deadline: March 27, 1997

Drop off your submissions in "The Thought Box," located in the Writing Center, Gamble Hall.