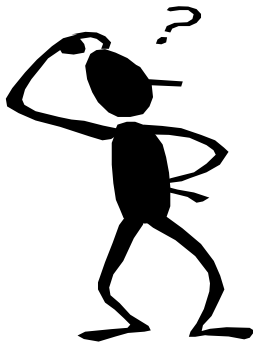


THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

The Newsletter of the Philosophical Debate Group



History, Philosophy and the Search for Truth

On April 11, Dr. Joe Weaver will give a lecture entitled "History, Philosophy and the Search for Truth." Specifically, Dr. Weaver will consider the issue from a Ricoeurian perspective. The following is an excerpt from Dr. Weaver's lecture:

"Paul Ricoeur's collection of essays published under the title 'History and Truth' is grouped in two sections. In the first section, Ricoeur examines the significance of history and historical works. In the latter section, Ricoeur undertakes what he refers to as a critique of civilization by considering various factors which organize and drive contemporary civilization. Utilizing selected

essays from both sections, I will explore Ricoeur's concepts of history and philosophy, and the dilemma raised by the two traditional approaches to the history of philosophy which he identifies. I will conclude by presenting Ricoeur's proposed solution and some implications it may have for the conception of truth."

Come to Gamble Hall Room 213 (Honor's Class) April 11th to share your thoughts on Dr. Weaver's talk.

A Report on the Previous Meeting

by *Eric Verhine*

On March 27, the PDG met to discuss happiness, its nature and grounds. The following is more or less a summary of the major points of discussion.

At the start of the discussion, I asked if anyone believed in a universally necessary definition of happiness. No one did. We did, however, come to a consensus that the consensus

on happiness in America is that it is a feeling of bliss, or a state of contentment. That happiness is often conceived of as a positive mental and emotional state seems obvious, but it is worthwhile to note. For, when happiness is defined thus, it becomes transitory, or unstable in nature, as some were quick to point out: one cannot sustain any state of contentment or emotional bliss for a protracted amount of time.

While we achieved a consensus on what most Americans construe happiness as, we reached no agreement regarding the means to reaching it. Most participants reasoned that the means to happiness are relative to the individual: "what makes you happy does not necessarily make me happy." This particular subject led to a discussion of whether our nation is better or worse as a result of its rampant relativism with regard to happiness and other ethical issues. Obviously, the statement "if it makes you happy, it can't be that bad" leads to conclusions that most of us would shun. For instance, would Ms. Crow carol these words to a child molester?

We also discussed whether concentration on one's happiness is contributive or destructive to it. Should one consciously seek to attain happiness, or should one simply pursue one's plans, believing that happiness might come as a byproduct? Dr. Nordenhaug zestfully advocated the view that extravagant concentration on one's own happiness only makes one unhappy; he went so far as to call this "Nordenhaug's law."

This is an inadequate summary of the numerous ideas and views that were stated and discussed. In order to give a fairer summary, I will list some of the more significant questions asked and opinions stated.

Compromise, in any sense, makes one unhappy.

Does absolute freedom lead to happiness or anxiety?

Could our country benefit from a more collective notion of happiness, one not solely focused on the happiness of the individual?

To be happy, one must avoid excess in things, ala Aristotle.

Has Christianity increased or decreased the happiness of humankind?

Is the term 'happiness' a helpful term now?

Can one be happy alone?

If happiness is a "state of contentment," is it worth having?

Can one create happiness for oneself?

The Happiness Paradox

From Joel Feinberg's *Reason and Responsibility* (1985)

"Happiness seems to be an elusive goal so long as we desire it alone and for its own sake....Imagine a person, Jones, who is devoid of intellectual curiosity. He has no desire to acquire any kind of knowledge for its own sake, and thus is utterly indifferent to questions of science, mathematics, and philosophy. Imagine further that the beauties of nature leave Jones cold: he is unimpressed by the autumn foliage, the snow-capped mountains, and the rolling oceans....Moreover, let us suppose that Jones can find no appeal in art. Novels are dull, poetry a pain, paintings non-sense and music just noise. Suppose further that Jones has neither the participant's nor the spectator's passion for baseball, football, tennis, or any other sport. Dancing is coeducational idiocy, conversation a waste of time, the other sex an unappealing mystery. Politics is a fraud, religion a mere superstition; and the misery of millions of underprivileged human beings is nothing to be concerned with or excited about. Suppose finally that Jones has not talent for any kind of handicraft, industry, or commerce, and that he does not regret that fact. What then is Jones interested in? He must desire something. To be sure, he does. Jones has an overwhelming passion for, a complete pre-occupation with, his own happiness. The one exclusive desire of his life is to be happy. It takes little imagination at this point to see that Jones's one desire is bound to be frustrated."

Feinberg suggests that the best way to get happiness is to forget it. Or, one will have a better chance of getting happiness if one aims at accomplishing worthy goals rather than at happiness itself as one's worthy goal.

Meeting Dates for Spring Semester

April 11, 2000

April 25, 2000

All meetings are in Gamble 213 at 7 pm

On April 25, 2000, Dr. Nordenhaug will give the next talk on Nietzsche entitled "The Path to the Abyss and The Eternal Return". Discussion of the topic will follow. All are invited.

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