

# THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

The Newsletter of the Philosophical Discussion Group

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*Please join us for our discussion on Technology (or anything else for that matter).  
We will meet in Gamble, room 213 on Friday, January 14<sup>th</sup> at 3:00 pm.*

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## News

By Chris Dunn

The great trick of the news is that the viewpoints presented are limited to only a few, generalized opinions that are reliably biased day in and day out. They will not appear biased, because chances are you, yourself are biased (for the record, I am not claiming to be an exception) and are thus blinded to the biases inherent in the media outlet of your particular liking. Of course the news seems to reflect your opinions for the very source of your opinions is the news. The news presents well worded, easy to swallow, political slogans and arguments that you and your friends can regurgitate at the water cooler. And if you happen to run into one who shares an opinion from the "other" or "bad" side and you get into an argument which may cause you to doubt your opinions, the news is right there to reinforce your previously held views by giving commonsensical explanations to repudiate all doubts. After all, how could one get anything done if one sat around all day doubting and thinking about

things? There are too many buildings to erect, laws to pass, and bombs to build as it is.

The news is funded by advertisements and like any advertisement driven media, the news must entertain in order to sell, thus it is crammed with unnecessary facts full of flash and flare. Of course tragedies and emotionally driven political accounts are interesting, and are thus most effective as means for propagating advertisements and political ideologies. Being that the news must be entertaining to sell, it is constantly trying to outdo its competitors with flashier and more attention-getting headlines. In addition, the news, like any form of entertainment, must appeal to the lowest common denominator in order to sell. Thus, relatively non-controversial, easy to understand views will dominate the bulk of its subject matter. However, the news is brilliant in its ability to disguise its lowly status by using big words (but not too big as to be lost on the common man) that seem to indicate a high level of education. Thus, when you and your friends are around the water cooler, you feel smart and knowledgeable with your news

induced vocabulary and opinions on all "important" matters of the day. Lastly, it must avoid any topics which may cause discomfort in its readers or upset the flow of normal society, namely those found in philosophical discourse.

The news is a necessary part of our modern, technological society. Abstract notions that could cause doubt and anxiety are presented in the form of problems in our society in which finding an immediate solution is of utmost importance and should thus consume the whole of one's thought. The news then propagates a select few solutions to the problem at hand, which seemingly oppose each other, but in the end picking one or the other has no real long term impact on the world, although the news certainly does an excellent job of portraying it as doing so. Take the recent presidential election, for example. Kerry or Bush, how many times was I asked this question? It was simply taken for granted that one or the other would take over and that it was my patriotic duty to have an opinion one way or the other. I am not necessarily

advocating any third party's as they may not have been much better or worse. I am only pointing out that there are more important issues than who holds a position in government, for the real power lies not in some rich, powdered figurehead, but in the individuals who make up the nation. The real issues are the everyday choices that you and I make. Should I get up in the morning? Should I love my neighbor as myself? Should I even participate in society? Why am I here? Who am I? These are the questions to which we ought to concern ourselves. If we can answer these, the power structure and laws of our governments will follow accordingly, for all else rests atop our beliefs concerning such questions. The news is the greatest inhibitor to such questions, as they can sometimes be uncomfortable ones which may inhibit the "progress" of society, or cause one to come to conclusions which may undermine the foundations upon which the news rests. Namely, that vast quantities of political information, or whatever else is in vogue, is necessary, that our purpose in life is to solve problems and to produce, and that the world is a material, rational place in which every worldview but consumerism is a religious ideology. To quote a bit of Thoreau:

And I am sure that I never read any memorable news in a newspaper. If we read of one man robbed, or

murdered, or killed by accident, or one house burned, or one vessel wrecked, or one steamboat blown up, or one cow run over on the Western Railroad, or one mad dog killed, or one lot of grasshoppers in the winter, -- we never need read of another. One is enough. If you are acquainted with the principle, what do you care for a myriad instances and applications? To a philosopher all *news*, as it is called, is gossip, and they who edit and read it are old women over their tea. Yet not a few are greedy after gossip. There was such a rush, as I hear, the other day at one of the offices to learn the foreign news by the last arrival, that several large squares of plate glass belonging to the establishment were broken by the pressure, - - news which I seriously think a ready wit might write a twelvemonth or twelve years beforehand with sufficient accuracy<sup>1</sup>.

On a lighter note, we are alive!

<sup>1</sup> Thoreau, Henry David. Walden. New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1993.

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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