

PHILOSOPHY

Section Moderator: Dr. Mark Anderson

Room: Massey Business Center 109

Time: 7:00 – 9:00 PM

7:00 – 7:30

“Existentialism, Aristotle, and Popular Psychology”

Ben Bryan

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Mark Anderson

Popular psychology has for some time been fascinated with the phenomenon of the identity crisis. It seems everyone is trying to “find himself.” One’s struggle to find himself is often referred to, and not accidentally, as an “existential crisis”. Popular psychology and existentialist philosophy often deal with related problems that stem from the same beliefs about human beings. Most ordinary people who undergo a so-called existential crisis are not, of course, committed existentialists. In fact, most of them likely have no clear idea what existentialism is to begin with. Aware or not, however, ordinary people often share a more or less existentialist view of human beings. As a result, they end up struggling with problems that are strikingly similar to those raised, albeit in more depth, by existentialist philosophers.

There are, however, other views of human beings than the existentialist’s. Adopting such a view would undermine the basis of the popular psychological identity crisis. The Aristotelian view of human beings is particularly potent in this regard. An Aristotelian view of human beings eliminates the problems of existentialism and replaces the identity-shaking crises of popular psychology with less serious problems to be solved by practical wisdom.

7:30 -8:00

“Stoicism Works”

Emily C. Telford

Dr. J. Mark Anderson

The practice of philosophical Stoicism is highly effective in guiding people towards the Good Life. Stoicism has been contemporarily misunderstood to promote indifference to feeling or suppression of emotion. These interpretations are inaccurate. The Stoics did not seek to suppress emotion, but rather to transform it by allowing reason to free one from passions in order to gain virtue.

A central element of practicing Stoicism requires distinguishing the things we can control from the things we cannot, and learning how to change the way we think about events. This process hinges on the vigilant quest for virtue. The more

virtuous we become, the less irrational we will be, and as we become virtuous our passions will become reasonable, allowing the practice of Stoicism to take affect.

Stoic practice is made difficult by our innate tendency to be unreasonable, but also by society's acceptance of vice as virtue. Throughout youth and adulthood we are fed stories that promote vice under the guise of adventure, courage and especially love. Famous lovers throughout history have abandoned reason to follow passions, which then inevitably leads them to vice. Society has glamorized these characters as heroes, in the process making the mere concept of Stoicism seem evil and unnatural.

This paper serves to introduce a history of Stoic philosophy, defend Stoic techniques, explore some critiques of Stoicism, and present a first-hand perspective of Stoicism at work.

8:00 – 8:30

"Decay in Plato's Philosophy"

Keith Johnson

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Mark Anderson

Two central questions for all serious thinkers are "what does it mean to live well?" and "how do we know?" For Plato, these questions are intimately connected. He taught that it was only through purifying the soul and becoming virtuous that an individual could hope to attain any knowledge at all. Only the pure soul is able to contemplate the eternal and changeless divine. It is in this state that the individual can be said to be happy. The problem for the soul is that it is immersed in physical reality, which is subject to decay and change. Allowing the soul to focus solely on the physical is to impede its highest function of contemplation and to make the good life impossible. Through education, however, we can learn to utilize and overcome decay. In doing so, we place ourselves in the greater context of reality and, while submitting ourselves to the divine, become as like God as possible.

8:30 – 9:00

"Philosophical Critiques of Democracy: Plato & Nietzsche"

Nathaniel J Greeson

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Mark Anderson

Political philosophers have debated for centuries which form of government is the best. The democratic form holds an assumed and privileged position in Western culture today, especially in America. The assumption that democracy is the best, and furthermore should be the world standard is pervasive in modern Western thought. Plato and Nietzsche both offer important critiques of democracy based on dramatically different ideals and assumptions. The pre-modern and modern critiques offer us some insight into the long-standing debate.

Looking to the *Republic* for Plato's critique of democracy Plato draws a parallel between man's soul and the *polis*, or city-state. Plato elaborates on how and why government is a macrocosm of the soul and identifies the democratic soul and city as worse only than a tyrannical soul or a political tyranny. Plato throughout his work rhetorically critiques democracies and 'the many' but also explores in depth the logical and metaphysical implications of justice and different forms of governance.

Nietzsche over the course of his life critiqued democracy for many different reasons. Nietzsche's ever-evolving philosophical writing career never produced a specific work of political philosophy or even an easy consensus. His dislike for democracy, however, never waned. Nietzsche believes democracy impedes culture's production of higher forms of human beings. The equalizing effect and rhetoric of democracy is, in Nietzsche's eyes, not only false but also detrimental to cultural and societal goals.