Gender and identity

Our social identities emerge as language develops, and various linguists indicate that language reflects gender differences, both those imposed by society and those that appear to be a matter of neurochemistry. As a child’s initial self-consciousness appears, at the age of two or even younger, society establishes gender lines. The self, the child’s self, recognizes and responds to those lines. Later, the self may ask the poignant and ancient philosophical question: who am I? How can gender not have played some role in both the question and the answer?

Gender and epistemology

Thanks to MRI’s and heat imaging we have some evidence that women use their brains differently than men. If so, are there different thoughts for males and females? Is there female knowledge and male knowledge? How is the way we think about sexual preference affected by such research? Is there a genetically-based lesbian thinking pattern?

Gender and ethics

Some social psychologists have indicated that women may naturally be better at care and nurturing. If true, would we say, at least according to one definition of ethics, that women are innately more ethical than men by dint of a different neurochemical structure? What are the implications of such a thesis? What changes would such a theory, if proven, bring about in how children are raised in our society? What roles would women be asked to play, both at home and in the work force?

What do you think? Come to Gamble Hall, Room 114, on Monday, September 28th, at 7:30 p.m. and share your ideas.

Hypatia (370 - 415 AD), philosopher, mathematician, and astronomer, led the Neo-Platonic school during her life in Alexandria, Egypt.
NOTES ON THE LAST MEETING

The September 28th meeting on the topic of money covered a wide range of philosophical and social issues, loosely linked by the idea of how we assign value.

The discussion began with Plato’s Republic, which forbids the Guardians from possessing money. The Republic outlines a vision of society best described as totalitarian. It was noted that the modern society which in some ways most resembled Plato’s utopia was Nazi Germany. Participants agreed that Plato’s famous work is probably best read as an analogy of the healthy soul, in which all components have their proper function, and in which a materialist ontology is fully rejected.

Moving to a definition of materialism, some people wondered if the term aptly defined our own culture. A distinction between consumerism and materialism was then drawn. Real materialism is not part of consumerism since consumer culture values the purchase, not the object purchased. Consumers do not necessarily value or care for purchases since they are disposable and replaceable.

A long portion of the discussion was devoted to work ethic and value. Work ethic comes from within, a form of discipline; we live under the dictates of a productivity ethic, enforced from outside. One of Marx’s central notions is alienation, in which the workers are divorced from their products. As work ethic has shifted, so has the focus of value, once thought to inhabit valued objects themselves, now thought more to be defined by the terms of the market. In such a society, neither sense of value resides with the individual.

The participants further wondered about the value of public space in America, concluding that private space means more to most people in America partly because of our lack of values other than materialism, though the problem is hardly limited to America.

LETTERS

On The Intellectual Whore

Recently I wrote to a good friend of mine, in my frustration with my job search, that I felt I had wasted the six years that I spent in college—because I could have made just as much money had I spent that time working and acquiring experience. There is no "un-send" button for e-mail to correct my philosophical faux pas, but the fact that those words had escaped cause me to pause for serious introspection. Did I go to college to improve my value as an item, or did I endeavor to enhance my value as a Self?

Should we choose the former, we devalue ourselves as autonomous beings. It is not within our power to change the monetary necessities of survival, but our attitudes toward our studenthood are ours to nurture and cherish. Or to ignore. It seems to me that it is possible to both focus on the enrichment of our characters and have that enrichment affect the material aspects of our lives; however, I feel that if our emphasis is not firmly placed beyond material value, then our victories are Pyrrhic indeed.

Justice and Freedom as a commodity negate their existence as such. You cannot purchase the beauty of a sunset, the love of a friend, nor the peace of Self-worth. Each quality can be lost instantaneously in a single moment of quantitative Greed. In this misconception of our Striving we may not even be aware that they have left us for someone with a more fertile heart.

As we contemplate the meaning of our selves and how that value reflects in our perception of Education, we must decide whether we would will ourselves to be a person or an object for sale.
What Is a Woman?

Simone De Beauvoir suggests in *The Second Sex* that "one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one." For her, gender is "constructed," but implied in this formulation is a cognito, a self, who can take on, put on or somehow appropriate gender and therefore could, in theory, take on some other gender.

Is gender so flexible? What about biological sex? Beauvoir is clear that one becomes a woman, yet always under a cultural compulsion. Freud said "biology is destiny." Is culture also destiny? If so, what is feminist philosophy about? Is it to make women of men or men of women? Or are there other possibilities? Beauvoir also maintains that women are "marked" with femininity, but men are not marked with masculinity. The universal person is a male person, so there is no need to define masculine as carefully as feminine. Feminine is a lack of some male quality or qualities, since all qualities are inherently male. Women are then the sex that is less strong, less assertive, less intelligent (in some constructions), less empowered, and so on. This is the basics of Woman as Other.

Luce Irigaray would disagree. For her, woman is a pure absence. In some ways, she merely takes Beauvoir's analysis to its logical extreme (it seems to me). If all qualities are male, then there really isn't any such thing as female. What then does feminism seek in this instance but to make women into men? If only the male subject has any ontological reality, then all persons must be men and all language must be male (if it describes reality). This creates some problems for feminism. Who does feminism represent? Women? This assumes a woman who is universal and ontologically extant. But to do so falls into a problem of free will and determinism. If "women" can (re)construct their own gender, what are the choices? It would seem again that the only choice is to become men. Does feminism represent potential men? Is feminism the mechanism of producing men in bodies that have no penis? There is nothing standing in the way of this interpretation of feminism so long as we do not understand woman as something positive and separate from men, but is this even possible? Underlying all this is an understanding of the binary structure of sex, and the assumption of a subject who has made a social contract, knowingly or unknowingly, to adopt one gender or the other.

-Eric Miller

The category of sex is the political category that founds society as heterosexual.

-Monique Wittig

We allow our ignorance to prevail upon us and make us think we can survive alone, alone in patches, alone in groups, alone in races, even alone in genders.

-Maya Angelou
CELEBRATION AND ANNUAL FUND RAISER

Announcements

Thanks to Those Who Gave

The PDG wishes to thank Books-A-Million and Media Play for their generous donations of coffee-table books, cd's, and computer games for the PDG raffle this October 21st at AASU. Much thanks also to Kathy Miller, a local artist and proprietor of K Miller Studios, Inc. on 2 S. Stillwood Ct., for her donation of original art. Please stop by our Philosophy Booth on the day of the fair and purchase a chance to win these prizes. Tickets are only $1.00 apiece.

Contributions

The Philosophical Debate Group is always open to new ideas. If you've got any ideas for topics, articles, poems, or just general suggestions, please e-mail us at one of the addresses below or drop a note in the thought box in the Writing Center in Gamble 109.

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Erik Nordenhaug; 921-7322. E-mail: nordenhaug@armstrong.edu

Student President: Jane Martin-Brown; 961-9344. E-Mail: JCVerse@aol.com

Student Vice-President: Sema Long; 927-7323 E-Mail: S.Long@mailexcite.com

Meeting Times for Fall Semester

All meetings are at 7:30 p.m. in Room 114 in Gamble Hall.

Thursday, October 15
Monday, October 26
Thursday, November 12
Monday, November 23
Monday, December 7

Visit our Website!
http://www.thales1.armstrong.edu/pdg