



The
Phi Sigma Tau
Bulletin

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Issue 21

The Mustache: A Philosophical paradigm

The Mustache: A Philosophical Paradigm (& various discourses on the historical philosophy of shaving)

Jay Michael Arnold

“A kiss without a mustache, they said then, is like an egg without salt; I will add to it: and it is like Good without Evil.” Jean-Paul Sartre, *Words* (1964)

Since time immemorial man has searched for the meaning of life, and perhaps, throughout the ages, the answer has been right under his nose.

Beginning in the cradle of Western civilization, it was Socrates (470-399B.C.) who first laid the spark of debate upon the kindling of philosophical polemic concerning the mustache. As the Greek antagonist prepared to quaff the infamous hemlock (shaken not stirred) and thus proffer his life as a philosophy lesson for all posterity he proclaimed, “The unexamined life, though not worth living, can be greatly improved by a suave, pencil-thin mustache.” It was later disseminated by his disciples that Socrates was the president of the Clark Gable Fan Club.

Though most of the Greeks sported beards (and t-shirts during rush week) their obsession with the metaphysical ramifications of facial hair continued beyond Socrates’ death; probably best illustrated in Raphael’s painting, *The School of Athens*. In this monumental work of art, the age-old debate of which direction to shave was immortalized by Plato’s (427-347B.C.) hand pointing upwards signifying the motion of the razor and his student Aristotle (383-321B.C.) insisting on the downward stroke. Later, it was the American philosopher Alfred North Whitehead who would comment that the whole of Western philosophy is but Plato’s five o’clock shadow.

During the Middle Ages the controversy concerning the mustache and beard had become more complex than the dual motion of the razor stroke. In the Aristotelian tradition, the Christian

thinker and Dominican beautician, St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) formulated the cosmetological argument, one of his ‘Five Ways’ for male grooming. He would later write in his *Summa Mustachio* (an instructional booklet on the Five Ways), “A mustache denotes the absence of a beard. But it is not every absence of a beard that is called a mustache.”

Determined to capitalize on the popularity of Aquinas’ ‘Five Ways’, an English philosopher and entrepreneur invented and subsequently sold millions of his razors to the European public, making Ockham’s Razor the best-selling grooming tool (not to mention stocking stuffer) in Christendom.

Several hundred years later, the French rationalist and former drummer for a little known 80’s ‘big hair band’, Rene Descartes (1596-1650), in an attempt to doubt all that could be doubted (he was a compulsive doubter) uttered his famous axiom, “I trim, therefore I am.” Possessing an idea of the perfect mustache, he concluded it must exist. Unfortunately for Descartes, his tonsorial obsession kept him up late nights and subsequently in poor health, which led to his eventual demise in the employ of a Swedish princess equally obsessed with horseback riding at dawn.

The mustache and beard continued to be a source of epistemological quandary for many thinkers. George Berkeley (1685-1753), the Anglican bishop and Las Vegas crooner whose hit song, ‘Life is but a Dream’ topped the charts in 1715, concluded in his *Dialogues* that all men are actually clean shaven if their beard or

mustache is not being directly perceived. In addition, the radical empiricist and noted scholar on the handlebar mustache, David Hume (1711-1776) believed that a man's face was tabula rasa until ideas about facial hair were formed within the mind. For Hume, the beard and mustache were merely jumbles of hair impressed upon the lip, cheeks and chin.

Meanwhile, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), German epistemologist and sixty time winner of the Konigsberg 5K Walk, developed a moral theory of deontological ethics that he called the Cosmetic Imperative. "Grow a mustache or beard," he wrote, "Only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal trend."

Perhaps one of the most influential thinkers to ever address the question of facial hair was the German objective idealist, G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831). History, he observed, was a phenomenological synthesis of the mustache and beard into a unified, though hairy entity. For Hegel, facial hair was dynamic, changing, advancing and actualizing the ultimate state, which he called the Absolute Shave. His dialectic method (of holding the razor) would influence the beards of subsequent thinkers such as Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin.

However, the foundations of philosophy would be forever shaken when the German thinker and mustache aficionado, Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900), boldly proclaimed, "Shaving is dead." He would go on to say that, "But considering the state the species of man is in, there will perhaps be faces, for ages yet, in which his stubble will be shown." Both poetic and prophetic in his works, Nietzsche spoke of the eternal recurrence of facial hair and man's 'will to prune', especially sideburns. History, he insisted, is an unending dichotomy between the 'mustache' and 'shave' moralities.

Inspired by Nietzschean nihilism, the twentieth century witnessed the birth of existentialism. French playwright, Albert 'the barber' Camus (1913-1960) wrote, "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is shaving. Judging whether a mustache is,

or is not worth growing amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy." In his philosophical essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus presents an analogy that illustrates the human dilemma; modern man eternally condemned to push the hair off his face, only to have it grow back the next morning.

For the existentialists, nothing could be known outside one's own mustache or beard; thus man is alienated from his world and from other's reasons behind their facial hair. When the noted psychologist Carl Jung suggested that Adolf Hitler's mustache was a universal archetype of evil, the existential philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), invoked his now famous Charlie Chaplin Defense, stressing that the existence of a mustache precedes the essence behind a mustache. Nauseated by his own inability to grow a full mustache or beard, Sartre would later write, "Hell is other people, especially those with goatees."

Further stressing that philosophical debate about the nature of the mustache was fruitless, the Austrian linguistic philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) maintained that the mustache has no intrinsic meaning outside the face upon which it grows and thus any discussion of facial hair is merely a game. For many, Wittgenstein nailed shut the coffin lid of modern philosophical discourse with his famous proverb, "Whereof one does not shave, thereof one must remain hirsute."

Nevertheless, it seems that as long as man must face himself in the morning mirror and choose which part of his face to shave, if any at all, the paradigm of the mustache will remain at the forefront of philosophical inquiry and the heart of humankind's desire to know.

Dialogue Focus
Ayn Rand and Objectivism
October 10-16

Tara Smith, professor of philosophy at the University of Texas, will be the keynote speaker for several events featuring Objectivism, the philosophy of Ayn Rand, on the Texas State University-San Marcos campus. Dr. Smith is the author of a recent work, *Ayn Rand's Normative Ethics: The Virtuous Egoist* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), as well as *Viable Values: A Study of Life as the Root and Reward of Morality* (2000), and *Moral Rights and Political Freedom* (1995). She has contributed articles to the *Journal of Philosophy*, *American Philosophical Quarterly*, *Social Philosophy and Policy*, and *Law and Philosophy*.

All events are free and open to the public:

10/10 12:30pm Open Dialogue PSY 132 *Four Objections to Ayn Rand's Objectivism*
Eric Edgecomb & Laureta Huit (Dialogue students)

10/11 11am Open Dialogue PSY 132
Rand and Locke's Letters of Toleration
Prof. Robert Garmong, Philosophy, ACC

SPECIAL GUEST

10/12 9:30am Public Lecture Alkek Teaching Theater
The Virtuous Egoist
Dr. Tara Smith, UT Austin

10/12 11am Open Dialogue PSY 132
The Virtuous Egoist
Dr. Tara Smith

10/12 12:30pm Open Dialogue, Q and A PSY 132
Rationality, Virtue, and the State of the World
Dr. Tara Smith and Yaron Brook, Director, Ayn Rand Institute

Daily copies of the *New York Times* are provided near the Dialogue Room (PSY 132) to promote informed dialogues.

SPECIAL GUESTS

10/12 5:30 pm Public Debate Alkek Teaching Theater
Egoism versus Altruism
Dr. Yaron Brook, Director, Ayn Rand Institute, and Senator Robert Krueger, former U.S. Ambassador to Botswana, Moderator: Dr. Jeff Gordon, Philosophy

10/13 10am Public Lecture LBJ Teaching Theater
More on Egoism versus Altruism
Dr. Yaron Brook

SPECIAL GUEST

10/16 10am Public Address LBJ Teaching Theater
Global Capitalism: The Cure for World Oppression & Poverty
Prof. Andrew Bernstein (Visiting Professor of Philosophy, Marist College)

10/12 1 pm Open Dialogue PSY 132
Global Capitalism & Some Reflections on Its Consequences for Children
Dr. Andrew Bernstein

For the complete Dialogue schedule for Fall 2006, go to www.txstate.edu/philosophy.

Co-sponsors of the Philosophy Dialogue Series are American Democracy Project, Anthem Foundation for Objectivist Scholarship, College of Liberal Arts, Common Experience, Gina Weatherhead Dialogue Fund, *New York Times*, Mitte Honors Program, University Seminar, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, and Vice President for Student Affairs.

Community Reading Group

With the goal of deepening the discourse on issues raised by Objectivism, several individuals, including faculty members and students, have been meeting to read and discuss Tara Smith's book *Ayn Rand's Normative Ethics: The Virtuous Egoist*. Each participant received a complimentary copy of the book and will have several opportunities to engage directly with the author on her visit to campus Thursday, October 12. The weekly discussions have been led by Professors Audrey McKinney and Jeff Gordon.

Faculty News

A message from Craig Hanks

Hello all, and greetings from New York City where I am spending the 2006-2007 Academic Year on leave. This year I am Visiting Associate Professor of Philosophy at the Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, NJ; teaching classes in Ethics of Science and Technology and Philosophy of Technology. I am assisting in the redesign of the BA in Philosophy, the BA in Science and Technology Studies, and the formulation of a new MA in STS. I am also busy editing my manuscript for Technological Musings that should appear in early 2007, and awaiting final copyright clearance on selections for Technology and Value, a new collection of readings on Philosophy of Technology that will appear with Blackwell in late 2007. When not working I take advantage of Central Park for running, and haunt the neighborhood in search of the best bread and wine. Please drop me an email if you will be in town!

Peter and Ann-Marie Hutcheson report that their daughter **Jessica** is one of thirty eight students from Austin high schools to be named a National Merit Semifinalist. Semifinalists are current seniors and were the highest-scoring participants on the Preliminary SAT National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Text which they took as juniors last year. Semifinalists constitute less than one percent of the nation's current seniors.

Lijun Yuan recently earned a nomination for the Levenson Prize for Books in Chinese Studies. Her book, *Reconceiving Women's Equality in China*, combines philosophical research with true life experience, while also exploring the vast complexities of gender inequality.

ΦΣΤ Fall Events



Fall Initiation and Annual Alumni Banquet Friday, October 20

6:30 p.m.
\$25/person (initiates are free)
Cool Mint Café, 415 Burluson at North St.
(RSVP by Friday, October 13 to Beverly Pairett in PSY 110 or call 512-245-2285)



Panel Discussion: Fall Election Issues Wednesday, October 25

7:00-9:00, LBJ Teaching Theater 4-16.1
Jointly sponsored by *Pi Sigma Alpha*,
political science honor society, and
Phi Sigma Tau, philosophy honor society



Ethics Bowl Mock Competition Wednesday, November 8

5:00 Dialogue Room, PSY 132
Faculty and students are invited to serve as
judges and questioners for the
two teams who will represent Texas State
at the Regional Ethics Bowl
competition Nov. 11 at St. Mary's
University.



Owl People Fridays November 3, 10, and 17

2:00 Dialogue Room, PSY 132
The discussion topic will be
Existentialism. Everyone is invited.

Ethics Bowl

Two Texas State teams will compete in the Regional Ethics Bowl at St. Mary's University on November 11. This fall's cases, prepared by the Association for Practical and Professional Ethics, include treatment of chimps used for research, deceptive practices by television producers, anti-gay protesters at military funerals, ship breaking and environmental concerns, classified information and investigative journalism, surgery theaters, and grading disputes in dual credit courses. Participating students are: Rebecca Quillin, James Travis Ross, Zachary Perry, Benjamin Howard, Jamie Nicole McNeil, Michelle Methvin, Christine Vaughn, Matt Abedi. Coaches are Professors Lynne Fulmer and Jo Ann Carson.

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