

THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

The Newsletter of the Philosophical Discussion Group

*Please join us for a potential dialogue on truth and love (or anything else for that matter).
We will meet in Gamble 101 on November 16th at 5:00 pm.*

Truth and Love: Fragmented in Thoughts

By Chris Dunn

Organon: Truth is known by reason alone.

Johannes: Yes, but at what expense? Must we give up our humanity for a coherent system of truth claims?

Organon: Humanity is by nature reasonable; in what manner is humanity suppressed by rationality?

Johannes: Let us take an extreme case as an example, for in such cases, the fallacy in an argument is often exposed. Suppose, I am the only child of my elderly mother whom has been good to me throughout my life. Now, however, age has taken its toll and she is infirmed, unable to feed herself, walk on her own, or communicate beyond a grunt of pain or the occasional unintelligible statement. I am still young and have many wonderful opportunities before me. Should I stay beside her in her old age or go out and live as I please?

Organon: Why it would seem most obvious that you should stay beside her. She at one time took care of you while you were as helpless as she is now.

Johannes: So I owe her a debt then. But surely no one will come to collect or punish if I should choose to abandon her. Thus, I could easily run off and justify it as a waste of my life to sit idly and watch her suffer. Surely the net happiness would decrease as she won't be happy in her infirmity one way or the other, but if I stay, I will be unhappy and she will only be slightly more happy while I would be much happier leaving.

Organon: Indeed, if we take the most overall happiness to be the goal, then you should leave your dear old mother. But what if everyone abandons their old,

infirmed mothers? Would this not be disastrous?

Johannes: I don't see how it would, for this small sacrifice would be largely beneficial to the majority of mankind. The people who would be wasting their time caring for useless wretches could be out contributing to the world in greater ways like finding cures for diseases or helping the young who still have their whole lives ahead of them. And for the record, I would not be treating my mother as a means to anything.

Organon: I don't know how to respond to such profanity. However, your argument does seem to indicate it would be just as, if not more, rational to abandon your mother as to stay beside her.

Johannes: Then I think we can conclude that some other element besides rationality must be present for me to stay beside my suffering mother.

...

Johannes: Suppose I tell you that human beings are merely objects like cups and pencils to be manipulated for whatever suits me. Others are no more than objects of scientific analysis. They are "out there" to be experimented on as cogs in a great chain of cause and effect.

Organon: This certainly seems to run contrary to common ideals of human decency.

Johannes: Absolutely, but such "decency" is from a bygone age. We are now aware that this is a cold, calculated, scientific universe in which all components have a predictable part which can be known by careful examination and dissection.

Organon: How crude your language is!

Johannes: Let us take this course of thinking to its logical limit by considering humanity from a biological stance, namely in the form of Darwinism. Darwinism states that life is not a fixed category, but ever changing and

evolving. Over eons the most fit species will survive, humanity *happening* to be a stage on the way. Social Darwinism thus begins with the premise that some members of the human race are less fit to survive than others and therefore must be eliminated for the betterment of all.

Perhaps not active elimination, but if a mutated form of Homo-sapien naturally dwindles away, then it is by no means a bad thing.

Organon: I don't wish to think of humanity in such terms. A human being is more than a biological system or a component of the scientific universe; man has a soul.

Johannes: A soul? I know of no *rational* basis for such a claim.

Organon: Well, what I mean is, man is valuable in and of himself, not as a tool. And we aren't so isolated from one another as your description makes it seem, for my happiness is more often than not dependent upon the other.

Johannes: I see. Some might call love a desire such that one's own happiness depends on the happiness of the other.

Organon: Perhaps love is what makes such scientific descriptions of others as objects invalid.

Johannes: Then I think I have successfully shown that knowledge of truth requires more than reason. For the conclusions of reason will depend upon the premises assumed and if love is not assumed, the conclusions of reason will reflect the absence of love as a starting point. Although, I don't know if it is correct to call love a premise, it is more a *something* required in spite of reason for humanity to be valuable. Or perhaps, love is the seed of truth, which then grows and blossoms by means of reason.

Organon: Certainly, but by concluding that love is necessary for truth, I feel we have just entered into an endless hallway filled with the doors of unanswered questions and closed but one door behind

us which led the way in. For now, I must ask if love has limits. I should love my neighbor as myself, but what about an animal, a plant, or a rock? Are they subject to “reason” as you put it?

Johannes: This is a most difficult question. It would seem that much can be learned from experimental analysis of rocks and trees. Perhaps the decisive factor is consciousness. Others are conscious while inanimate objects are not.

Organon: Yes, but who can possibly know that your claim is true? I am aware of my own consciousness, but on what grounds can I know that any of the objects of which I am conscious possess consciousness?

Johannes: From my perspective, a human being is an object of my consciousness and I infer from the similar phenomenal makeup of the other to myself that the other is conscious. I make the inverse inference concerning inanimate objects.

Organon: Humm! Must you make things so difficult? Well, if consciousness of any object of consciousness is indeed merely an inference based on similarity, and if love is limited to conscious beings, then we can only make a probable assertion that we should love the other, as we can only know with probability that the other is conscious. So perhaps consciousness is not the element which differentiates what should be loved.

Johannes: I have heard it said, however, that the world (being the sum total of all possible objects of consciousness) is itself conscious, or to put it another way, that consciousness pervades all elements of reality. If this is so, consciousness can still be maintained as that which validates an object of love, but in this case love should be directed toward all, but it oft seems necessary to hate, to conquer, and to kill. How does one know the limits and the balance to these elements? For example, I need to manipulate and exert total control over a hammer when I am building a house. Why am I not entitled to do the same to a human being? If both are merely objects of consciousness, then what morally separates one from another? Another example is that of a vagrant who has abused my spouse. Am I not entitled to defend myself and to administer justice?

Organon: I don't know how to answer such a barrage of questions, let us leave

that to the endless toil of philosophers. In the meantime, I must add to their millstone a few more points of inquiry. If emotion takes precedence over reason, then why assume that love is the foundational or more valuable emotion? Hate, anger, and lust for power are elements common to each individual at some point or another. These elements must serve some purpose, else the purpose of all elements of humanity and existence must be brought into question as merely arbitrary and whimsical. And if it is true that all is arbitrary, then I am bound by no obligations concerning others and I am no more or less justified in treating the other as an object. It would be odd for hatred to be an aspect of humanity with no purpose. In our modern times, we are taught to suppress hatred while love is exemplified. A possible interpretation to explain the existence of hate is that it was a necessary aspect for survival in our ancestors tribal existence, where kill or be killed may have been an everyday struggle. When people were scarce and in a hostile environment they needed to dominate and be aggressive. As civilization encroached upon all lands and nations became more populated, a gentler, more passive and womanly ethic emerges while hate and aggression are increasingly suppressed and devalued. Look at the birth of Christianity in Rome, the birth of Hinduism in India, and our own modern condition. Such “turn the other cheek” ethics and religions become necessary when we are all crammed on top of each other. It is also true that the greatest demonstrations of hate have been born from great masses, so perhaps the aforementioned ethics are a means to equilibrium.

Johannes: From your reasoning, it would seem that love and hate are merely emotional tools for survival, neither being better than the other. In fact, your description of love suggests love is a weakness while hate is a strength. Such a belief could lead to great evils, like the great demonstrations of hate which you mention, but I suppose if one has bought into such a definition of love, then good and evil must also be rejected as being tools with neither being better than the other. Love is only weakness in that one is utterly dependent on others, yet love is the epitome of strength in that one will move mountains for its sake.

Love as you have described it falls short of truth just as reason falls short. Love is more than mere subjective feeling or sexual passion. Truth must rest upon a greater foundation. These are only manifestations of a much greater love, a love that pervades the individual subject. God is love. What this means rationally, I know not. Nevertheless it is quite clear that action, emotion, belief, reason, and life are but empty vanity without this love.

Letter to the editor

The New Morality

By Sigmound Nightze

I was quite impressed with the last Philosopher's Stone on “Evil!” in which the author states, “the sinner is no better than the saint, and the saint is no better than the sinner; each has the potential to construct a new moral code and live by it.” I was so impressed I decided to invent a new morality.

- 1) All is purposeless.
- 2) Emotion guides reason.
- 3) Oneself and other selves cause pain.
- 4) Hate what is painful.
- 5) Hate your neighbor as yourself.

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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