

## The Rhetoric of Chiasmus #6

### Philosophy

*The quest for knowledge is one of humanity's earliest drives. The benefits we all enjoy are a direct result of that quest, which is apparently never-ending. And, we started it all by asking a question, a word that has common roots with quest. **But is it better to answer the question, or question the answer?** Well, philosophically speaking....*

It is said that the oldest profession is prostitution. That's probably true. But, I'd hazard a guess to say that the second oldest is the philosopher who searches for knowledge, particularly about and for the self. One of the many online dictionaries puts it this way: philosophy is "the rational investigation of truths and principles of being, knowledge, or conduct."

One way or another, during each day, we all engage in some form of philosophical enquiry, however fleeting or banal it might be, and perhaps beginning with that age-old question: Who am I? I don't know about you, but I'm still trying to work that one out for myself.

But that's me: confused about most things for most of my life, about all the questions that we all have to tangle with. I now console myself in my later years, though, with the thought that **wisdom is not the absence of confusion and confusion is not the absence of wisdom**. I'm not much wiser, however, knowing that. Though, the questioning aspect of philosophy is, obviously, the *sine qua non*; but, which is more important – **answer the question, or question the answer?** Is there a satisfactory answer? Concerning legal matters, lawyers and judges would have something to say on that, of course.

But Philosophy (with that big P) covers all aspects of the human condition. Among the many topics that grab famous philosophers – and mentally torture many of us – are things like Being, Truth, Beauty, Love, Evil and, of course, God. The last two are a bit touchy, so I'll concentrate on aspects of the others for now. (I'll return to God, religion, etc another time.) Of the remainder, though, perhaps the most abused and misused is the concept of Truth despite the fact that, by the time we are all seven years old or less, we know – don't we? – that honesty is the best policy.

Ha! Would you like to tell that to your local, state and federal politicians? No, I didn't think so – in the same way you would ignore anybody who told you that parents must always be honest with their children. Or their friends. Or each other. Get somebody drunk, however, and we all know that **in wine there is truth; but also, in truth there is often a whine**. Who ever wants to listen to that, then? Sometimes, somebody does, I guess....

One of the big problems with telling what you *think* is the truth – in contrast to *fact* – is it's always conditional and subjective. Which just opens up more opportunity for confusion as we argue about different levels of truth – also known as lies – until we might reach a point where, in all matters, **the lies about the truth is where the truth lies**. Well ... for me, if not for you, if you know what I mean.

Keep abusing one's truth by mixing it with lies, however, just leads to a point where we don't know when **the use of abuse becomes simply the abuse of use**. And vice-versa. After all, nobody much likes lies; strangely, though, not too many like the truth either, a lot of the time – especially about themselves. Although, on balance, we like to get just a teeny bit more of the latter, in the same way that we're all jolly glad the cosmos contains just a teeny bit more matter than anti-matter, wouldn't you say?

Yes, of course; otherwise, we'd eventually wind up with societal chaos, an inevitably destructive condition for humanity. Can't have that in our Newtonian world, can we? On the other hand, at the quantum level, **does chaos rule because there are no rules for chaos?** Or in spite of rules, thereby resulting in an apparent paradox? Perhaps I should just finish with this: **in art there is truth, but also, in truth there is an art**. That's what we must live with each day....

This constant search for knowledge and understanding leads into other confusing areas when I expand upon that first question about identity which, these days on the Internet, has reached the point where **it's so easy to construct an identity, it's almost certain now that all identity is just construction**. So, perhaps we are never just one person, one identity? Perhaps that has always been the case? In a consumer world, for example, we are told that we are what we eat, or inhabit, or drink, or drive and so on. **Yet, it's not what you drive that's important – it's what drives you!** And, inevitably, **whatever you consume, consumes you**. To put that another way, **when you own something, eventually it owns you**.

So, do we all just go back to the jungle, back to Nature? Well, we can't escape it, just as we cannot escape the reality of our demise. Woody Allen, you'll recall, doesn't worry about death, but he said he'd rather not be there when it happens. It's the pain, you see: not many like it when they get it, understandably. But, which is worse: **the fear of pain, or the pain of fear?** There's a silver lining with death, anyway, apart from the idea of an after-life in which many believe, and it's this: **as you must know, it's when death comes at the end that it's the end of death as you know it**. So, don't worry, as the song goes....

Not sure about the happy part though, happiness being something exquisitely personal to each individual; although, for me, **happiness might be doing what you love, but I'd suggest that heaven is loving what you do**. And, in the final analysis of whatever you do in life, **if you always resolve to test yourself, that itself will test your resolve always**.

As a final thought for this essay, perhaps you recall the ensuing debate after the publication of *The End of History and the Last Man* by Francis Fukuyama? I read the book and was quite taken with Fukuyama's core argument that our species has reached an historical resting point with the institution of liberal democracy. At about that same time, I also recall my university lecturer discussing the idea that (big P) Philosophy was dead and wondered if that is true. After many years I recently framed it within chiastic rhetoric, thus: **Is there no end to Philosophy, or is no Philosophy the end?**

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