

TREATISE ON MORALITY

A play in one act

by

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TREATISE ON MORALITY

TREATISE ON MORALITY Character List

- NARRATOR: A female philosopher, 22-35.
- VISITOR: An unassuming observant male, 40-55.
- PROPRIETOR: A male simpleton, 40-55.
- SOCRATES: A male Greek philosopher, 48-52.
- GLAUCON: A male Greek philosopher; Socrates' protégé, 24-28.
- JOHN STUART MILL: A male English philosopher, 53-56.
- RENE DESCARTES: A male French philosopher, 37-44.

TREATISE ON MORALITY

SCENE ONE

FADE UP L

NARRATOR'S narrow studio apartment L stage. A partition divides L and R stage. R stage is not lit.

Inside the apartment there is a worn arm chair with a high back, a side table with a goldfish in a bowl, an unmade sofa bed, a storage system made from old milk crates, and bookshelves with bound philosophical doctrines.

A large study board is affixed to the sidewall L.

(The NARRATOR sits at a wooden desk with her dog at her feet). On her desk is a Venus Flytrap in a pot and an open bound volume. (NARRATOR thumps shut the volume).

(SILENCE)

(NARRATOR turns to look at the study board. She reads a quote on the study board to the AUDIENCE.)

NARRATOR

Act only according to the maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law. Immanuel Kant.

(The NARRATOR jumps up from her desk, unhooks the study board from the wall, and carries it to the front of the stage. She leans the board against a crate so that it faces the AUDIENCE for them to read.)

NARRATOR

Act only according to the maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.

TREATISE ON MORALITY

(The NARRATOR enthusiastically presents her interpretation of the quote to the AUDIENCE.)

NARRATOR

Awareness! Act with awareness.

(Delighted with herself, the NARRATOR walks from L to R engaging the AUDIENCE).

NARRATOR

It logically follows that the universal law chosen for our system of morality will be - *all people who have hair should be aware!*

(She pauses when she notices a member of the AUDIENCE who is follicly challenged.)

NARRATOR

Of course I don't expect those *without hair* to be as aware.

(She teases and addresses members of the AUDIENCE who have more hair.)

NARRATOR

Certainly, they would not be as aware as those *with hair* (amused).

(NARRATOR moves to her high back arm chair and plunks herself into it; sits as if she is royalty).

NARRATOR

This is my will.

(She grabs a white hand towel from the side table next to the goldfish bowl.)

NARRATOR

My empirical experience and rational mind confirm this premise to be true.

TREATISE ON MORALITY

(She puts the hand towel horizontally across her head; mimicking a Judge.)

NARRATOR

Before we proceed allow me to clarify our system of morality so that we are all clear on the changes I've made to the law.

(SILENCE)

NARRATOR

The first principle is that hair makes you aware.

(She smacks her hand down on the arm of the chair to signify that an official declaration has been made.)

(SILENCE)

NARRATOR

The second principle is that because you have hair, and therefore you are aware, you must behave in a manner that is consistent with your amount of hair - regardless of the outcome. This is a categorical imperative.

(She smacks her hand on the arm of the chair again.)

(SILENCE)

NARRATOR

Anyone not acting in accordance with their amount of hair will be held accountable and suffer consequences for their actions.

(Directed at an AUDIENCE MEMBER with sparse hair).

NARRATOR

Shaving of heads will not be permitted and will be closely scrutinized.

(SILENCE)

TREATISE ON MORALITY

NARRATOR

The third principle is that bald men, infants, the elderly, or those people generally without hair, or with less hair, can behave in any manner that is consistent with their amount of hair.

(SILENCE)

NARRATOR

(Considerately) Their lack of awareness is to be expected and is not unacceptable conduct. They are breaking no laws.

(She smacks her hand on the arm of the chair again and rises to her feet. She walks to her dog and examines it.)

NARRATOR

I guess dogs, cats, horses, wombats, possums and the like must be aware too, simply because of the amount of hair. But I'm pretty sure us humans don't have to worry about them. (Ponders) I recall something being decided somewhere about us being the ones who embody reason and we are superior because of this rationality. (Adjusts the towel on her head to make sure it is still in position.) Sounds about right to me.

(NARRATOR picks up the Venus Flytrap on her desk and examines it.)

NARRATOR

Definitely plants don't matter, except for African Violets and, of course, the Venus Flytrap.

(She turns to the AUDIENCE resentfully as if they are responsible).

NARRATOR

They will take up their rightful position on the top of the pecking order from this time forward.

(She walks to the side table and lifts up the goldfish bowl; examines the fish inside).

TREATISE ON MORALITY

NARRATOR

Another benefit of the new order is that we can forget about the cold-blooded creatures in the ocean and lakes. They are just blubber, scales, eyes and some fins. Hardly a hair there!

(The NARRATOR returns to her arm chair.)

NARRATOR

Now let us examine this allegory.

FADE DOWN L

TREATISE ON MORALITY

SCENE TWO

FADE UP R

An vibrant and overabundant ICE CREAM SHOP stage R. A red and white diagonally-striped pillar stands near a door at the rear of stage. Next to the pillar is a handwritten blackboard decorated with smiley faced sunflowers and it states eleven flavors of milkshakes, including lime and vanilla malt, is available for purchase.

The Candyman croons in the background. A donut machine produces freshly cooked donuts and the aroma of toasting sugar fills the air. (It lures a VISITOR from the AUDIENCE to the stage to investigate.)

The shop's counter has a till. Warm caramel and chocolate fudge sits in crockpots to the side of the till, escorted by bowls of whipped cream, crushed nuts and glacé cherries.

The counter is placed between two display cabinets. In one display cabinet there is tubs of ice-cream, and in the other cabinet there is a wide assortment of decorated iced donuts. A *humble pineapple donut sits alone in a tray.*

Mounted behind the display cabinets is a colorful sign that boasts the shop sells 36 flavors of ice cream including *Chocolate Erotica, Cookie Dough, Licorice* and *Strawberry Cheesecake*. Other signs that show there is fairy floss, cooked donuts, and hot potatoes with a choice of Bolognese, Cajun spice, or butter chicken topping.

(The PROPRIETOR wipes down a bench at the rear of the shop. He greets the VISITOR with a nod and a smile which

TREATISE ON MORALITY

reveals his blackened and poorly aligned teeth.) The PROPRIETOR wears a paper boat hat and a candy-striped apron. *His hair is thinning, parted and swept across his scalp.*

(The VISITOR nods to the PROPRIETOR and commences assessing the produce on display. He takes a moment to watch the moist batter dripping into hot fat from the donut cylinder. Just as he is about to take his money from his pocket he spots a poster with a blue soft serve ice cream in a cone with pink fairy floss wrapped around it - it resembles that the ice cream is wearing a ballerina's tutu. The PROPRIETOR grins foolishly at the VISITOR.)

(It is too much for the VISITOR; he is in sensory overload. He sits at a circular table designed for two and rests his head in his hands. After a moment, he notices two GREEK MEN who are sitting at a similar table. The two GREEK MEN stare at the iced-donuts in the display cabinet.)

The GREEKS are dressed in white sheets, fastened on one shoulder, and have laurels on their heads. The older one of the two, is well fed, has a hairy chest and a pot belly. *He has silver wavy locks, which are thinning, and a full-length beard.* This is SOCRATES. The younger male is flaccid with little detectable muscle tone. *He has thick dark ringlets which tumble down the side of his face - fingering his youthful olive chin.* This is GLAUCON. They sit with their backs to the store's lights. (The VISITOR overhears their conversation).

SOCRATES

Behold! We find ourselves in a corner shop with an abundant display of produce that is illuminated externally by the sun and internally by fluorescent globes which are fixed in place behind our backs.

TREATISE ON MORALITY

(SOCRATES' eyes remain fixed on the cabinet with the iced-donuts).

SOCRATES

My dear Glaucon, what do you say if we imagine we have not been able to leave our seats in this shop since we were children and that our heads have been fixed in place so that we are unable to move our gaze away from the assortment of donuts presented before us? Outside the shop, and behind our backs, people move but we only perceive their presence as our eyes are averted.

GLAUCON

You show me a strange image Socrates. Then we shall be a type of prisoner in this shop?

(GLAUCON'S eyes also remain fixed on the cabinet with the iced-donuts).

SOCRATES

Yes, and is that not precisely the situation we find ourselves in now dear Glaucon?

GLAUCON

Yes, that is exactly true Socrates.

(The VISITOR watches SOCRATES and GLAUCON sit motionlessly until he is distracted by an Englishman; JOHN STUART MILL).

MILL wears a double-breasted sack coat with a flamboyant navy lapel and is sitting at the other side of the shop. He is striking; with piercing pale eyes, high cheekbones, a sharp pointed chin and a *receding hairline*.

(The VISITOR is mesmerized by MILL's intensity. MILL does not notice the VISITOR.)

(MILL jumps up from his table, slams his fist down and causes the cutlery to shake).

TREATISE ON MORALITY

JOHN STUART MILL

This is a moral dilemma!

(MILL's outburst startles SOCRATES and GLAUCON but they do not move their heads to examine the troublemaker.)

SOCRATES

Suppose we could hear an echo of a voice but not be able to make out its form, should we not just choose to converse on what we see before us and ignore the echo?

GLAUCON

Yes, a good idea.

(MILL begins to rant.)

JOHN STUART MILL

It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied! And if the fool, or the pig, are of a different opinion, it is because they only know one side of the equation.

GLAUCON

Socrates I am concerned, I heard an echo refer to you... something about a pig or a fool.

SOCRATES

No, my dearest Glaucon, that could not be the case, it is just an illusion, we only truly know what we can see before us, or hear directly from each other, until of course, we can move our heads and expose ourselves to the true form of that which surrounds us.

GLAUCON

Being a prisoner does have some benefits.

SOCRATES

Indeed it does.

(SOCRATES and GLAUCON laugh. Their laughter irritates the tempestuous MILL and whips him into a frenzy.)

TREATISE ON MORALITY

JOHN STUART MILL

The only solution is to elicit the assistance of the higher faculties. We could consume all the products behind the counter for our pleasure but those of us who are not fools must be able to implement the capacity of reason to assist us in making an informed choice.

(MILL turns to study the occupants of the shop. He looks past the VISITOR. His attention is drawn to a refined FRENCH GENTLEMEN *with a fringe, goatee, and a long flowing mane of black hair*, who is seated in the back corner.) This GENTLEMEN has a pallid complexion and wears an ebony cape, white linen shirt with lapels, and matching wrist ruffs. He is RENE DESCARTES. The table where he sits is lit with a candlestick. (DESCARTES dips a quill into a pot of ink and is immersed thought).

JOHN STUART MILL

You there! (Points his finger at DESCARTES.)

(DESCARTES meekly lifts his head, his quill still firmly pressed onto the page.)

JOHN STUART MILL

Yes, I am addressing you! We have a crisis on our hands! Surely, I'm not the only one in this establishment who recognizes this.

(Spit flies from the force of MILL'S delivery and lands inches away from the VISITOR'S hand.)

RENE DESCARTES

(Responds calmly.) Excuse me Monsieur but one must be able to determine one's own perceptions.

(This does nothing to appease MILL.)

JOHN STUART MILL

Announce yourself. Who do I hold court with?

TREATISE ON MORALITY

RENE DESCARTES

(Softly spoken.) I am a philosopher. I travel and learn by observation, trusting my own senses. I mix with people from diverse temperaments and ranks, and I gather experiences, and test myself on whatever comes my way.

(MILL is somewhat pacified by the tenor of DESCARTES response.)

JOHN STUART MILL

I too, am a philosopher. But I have noted that there appears to be elements of illusion at play here.

(MILL strides over to DESCARTES table and straddles the chair opposite him.)

RENE DESCARTES

Rest assured, one's mind has not been hijacked by an evil demon placing an illusory external world before one's senses, even though such a demon can be clever, powerful and deceitful.

(The VISITOR shakes his head and ponders about the characters in his neighborhood and the challenges they must face with their mental health.)

JOHN STUART MILL

Could one be forgiven for mistaking that this shop doesn't exist?

RENE DESCARTES

Yes, if one is skeptical of one's existence that does in fact prove that they do exist. The shop exists through the mere act of doubting that it is there.

JOHN STUART MILL

Ah the French. You have all the answers! (He relaxes momentarily).

(The VISITOR watches on).

RENE DESCARTES

Thought cannot be separated from me, therefore I am.

TREATISE ON MORALITY

(MILL is placated.)

RENE DESCARTES

True philosophy means to obtain wisdom. I perceive my body through the senses, however these have previously been unreliable, so preference must be given to my ability to think.

(MILL nods.)

RENE DESCARTES

(As if he is sharing a secret). Thought is what happens to me as such that I am immediately conscious of it, insofar as I am conscious of it.

(Both DESCARTES and MILL recognize the humor in this comment and crack into laughter).

RENE DESCARTES

Tell me what you make of this problem?

JOHN STUART MILL

The proprietor has the right to sell goods without any harm to others. Happiness is the key. But the point of concern for many of us with the higher faculties is that we can fall under the influence of temptation causing us to postpone the use of our faculties and to participate in the same manner as those with a lower capacity.

RENE DESCARTES

I see. (Silence.) You are concerned with being perceived as a fool because you want to consume the produce in this establishment to gratify your desire?

JOHN STUART MILL

Precisely! Isn't that the concern of every philosopher? No philosopher wants to be considered a fool.

RENE DESCARTES

Yes, of course it is, well at least as far as I can adequately discern! (Nonchalantly laughs).

(MILL cackles but then stops suddenly, overcome with emotion.)

TREATISE ON MORALITY

JOHN STUART MILL

No intelligent human would consent to be an ignoramus, even though they could be persuaded by the fool, dunce, or rascal, that their faculties are better than his.

(MILL is referring to the PROPRIETOR who grins and winks at him).

RENE DESCARTES

(Concerned.) My senses tell me that this has happened to you on more than one occasion Monsieur?

(MILL nods, unable to look DESCARTES in the eye.)

RENE DESCARTES

I see. A well-informed mind can make good choices, depending on the mental condition of course, and if in fact the mind is under one's complete control.

JOHN STUART MILL

Yes, you understand my predicament.

RENE DESCARTES

Indeed I do.

JOHN STUART MILL

Who am I if I cannot be defined by that which I am not?

RENE DESCARTES

Yes deductive reasoning does involve setting oneself apart from others. Comparing oneself to fools is a key philosophical requirement.

JOHN STUART MILL

Who am I if I am not viewed as their superior? How can I establish any theory regarding their inadequacies if I am not held in a higher esteem than they?

(Both men sit quietly in contemplation.)

JOHN STUART MILL

What do you make of those two over there with the laurels on their heads?

TREATISE ON MORALITY

(DESCARTES examines SOCRATES and
GLAUCON.)

RENE DESCARTES

One senses something is at odds with them. They require
meticulous observation.

(The VISITOR watches the ENGLISHMAN and
the FRENCHMAN observe the behavior of
the two GREEKS who remain spellbound by
the iced-donuts in the display cabinet.
A minute passes before someone speaks.

SOCRATES

We require a Guardian so we may obtain a donut.

GLAUCON

Yes Socrates, but there is not one available due to the
rigorous demands placed on the Guardians from the
implementation of the new curriculum.

SOCRATES

Remind me, dear Glaucon, of their current load?

GLAUCON

Yes, certainly Socrates. The government agreed with all your
recommendations. The Guardians are being educated in the
understanding of wisdom and temperance until they reach 18.
This is to be followed by 2 years of gymnastics, 10 years of
mathematics, 5 years of dialectic training. It is then that
they will be able to spend 15 years as leaders and to rid
this city of its swine.

SOCRATES

Wonderful! Without controlling them we are not able to
control their rulers.

GLAUCON

It is indeed true.

SOCRATES

I must recommend that poetry and fiction be withdrawn from
their education. Poetry feeds the waters of the passions
instead of drying them up. She lets them rule although they
ought to be controlled.

TREATISE ON MORALITY

GLAUCON

Imitative art has no place in a just city.

SOCRATES

True. Artists only create copies of the real world. Anyone influenced or absorbed by an artist is a simple creature who cannot analyze nature without a need to see it imitated.

GLAUCON

Yes, unfortunately humans cannot tell the difference between what is real and of that which is an illusion.

JOHN STUART MILL

You speak the truth.

(MILL remains unheard by SOCRATES and GLAUCON.)

GLAUCON

And what place should laughter have in this city of pigs?

SOCRATES

It is a profound quandary my dear Glaucon. There is a principle in human nature which is disposed to raise a laugh, and this you restrain by reason.

GLAUCON

Because you are afraid of being thought of as a buffoon?

SOCRATES

Exactly. This risible faculty becomes stimulated at the theatre, where it betrays me, and I am unconsciously forced to play the comic poet at home.

GLAUCON

I see, it is best to keep this held down and concealed so it does not rise up in the public domain.

SOCRATES

Yes, it is, dear Glaucon. (Adjusts his toga.) I have it under a firm grip at the present moment.

TREATISE ON MORALITY

(The VISITOR begins to refocus on what to buy in the shop. Instantaneously,

he realizes that the most valuable item in this shop is the pineapple donut - but at that moment so does everyone else.)

GLAUCON

Socrates, I need to have the pineapple donut.

SOCRATES

My dear Glaucon, I have detected movement instructing me of the exact same thing.

GLAUCON

Then we have a problem. (Pauses). Socrates, if the donut came to me first, I could give you a percentage and this would render me innocent in the eyes of the gods.

SOCRATES

How much of a percentage do you propose?

(GLAUCON breaks his gaze from the display cabinet and holds out his thumb and index finger signifying that he will give SOCRATES one small bite.)

JOHN STUART MILL

Rubbish! That donut is mine.

RENE DESCARTES

Messieurs. Refrain! I propose that one should act in a manner that provides the greatest amount of happiness for the majority of stakeholders. Therefore, we should divide the donut equally and distribute it accordingly.

JOHN STUART MILL

Codswallop! I want it, and I am having it. My happiness is for the greater good.

(MILL jolts up and stomps around behind the counter into the service area. He pushes the PROPRIETOR out of the way and grabs the donut.

TREATISE ON MORALITY

He is about to bite into it when SOCRATES and GLAUCON lunge forward and take hold of him, placing MILL in a head lock.)

RENE DESCARTES

Contain yourselves. It resembles a donut but we do not know its true form.

(No-one listens to DESCARTES. MILL gets his hand loose, takes hold of an ice cream scoop and squeezes it onto the nose of SOCRATES. GLAUCON clutches the donut from MILL'S hand, and as he does, he squashes it.) The donut falls on to the floor and is broken into crumbs.

(MILL is distraught, he begins to sob. DESCARTES rises from his seat to comfort MILL through his grief.)

RENE DESCARTES

I do not believe one must refrain from tears to prove oneself a man.

JOHN STUART MILL

Happiness is the greatest measure of what is right or wrong. (He shakes his fist.) Bloody Greeks! A being of a higher faculty requires more to make him happy as he is more capable of suffering than his inferiors.

(SOCRATES and GLAUCON are not bothered by the experience and instead are now captivated by the fluorescent light.)

JOHN STUART MILL

I should have charged out the door with the donut. Happiness is directly opposite to the need to comply with moral duties or rules.

(DESCARTES gently pats MILL on the back - as if he is putting a baby to sleep. After a few moments MILL bounces back.)

TREATISE ON MORALITY

JOHN STUART MILL

I must go my friend; I have a treatise to complete.

(MILL bolts out of the door at the rear of the stage. All parties in the shop are relieved that he is gone.)

SOCRATES

What lessons have we learnt today?

GLAUCON

The philosopher is the ideal ruler of the community?

SOCRATES

More than this. We cannot let our passions rule our actions or our way of thinking, we need to control them so we can increase our happiness and obtain the goods of our desires.

GLAUCON

It is true Socrates. I could have had that donut if I had been in control of my senses.

SOCRATES

Come, let us walk towards the light.

(SOCRATES and GLAUCON walk out of the shop by the rear door of stage and into streams of sunlight. They shield the strength of the sun with their arms and divert their eyes from its glow.)

(The VISITOR is content to finalize his order. He approaches the counter.)

VISITOR

(Proudly to the PROPRIETOR). A ballerina's tutu please.

(DESCARTES *flicks his locks* and returns to his journal. He is unaffected by the whole fracas that has taken place.)

FADE UP L STAGE to see NARRATOR in her arm chair.

NARRATOR

(To the AUDIENCE). Now we see. The Frenchman has remained calm and has behaved with awareness.

TREATISE ON MORALITY

The Englishman has behaved as expected, and in parallel with his amount of hair. No penalties need to be applied; he has acted in accordance with our system of morality. (Gets out of her chair and walks to the front of the stage). The Greeks have behaved with varying levels of awareness which is inconsistent with their amount of hair. As such, they have failed to comply with the second principle of morality and have suffered the consequences of their actions - they were not able to eat the pineapple donut.

(NARRATOR moves back to arm chair and sits).

FADE R STAGE TO BLACK

NARRATOR

(To the AUDIENCE). Now that you have had the opportunity to explore our new system of morality I should like to extend an invitation for you to join me in my next philosophical endeavor; *Discourse on Human Sexuality*. In the first volume of the eleven, I will set out my hypothesis on ear lobes. I shall outline the part that ear lobes play in human sexual attraction. I shall attempt to convince you that there is a direct correlation between attached and detached lobes and Cartesian Dualism. I have more than an inkling that ear lobes hold the key to everything we need to know about the libido as well as mind body theory. Good evening.

FADE TO BLACK