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School of Philosophy

27° – Knight of the Sun or Prince Adept

Topic 2/Essay Assignments 1 and 2 Combined

“Reconciliation”

Introduction

“Are we there yet?” “When can we go to the park?” “Will you read me a book?”  
“What’s ‘baseball’?” “Why is the sky blue?” “Who is God?” “Where do you go when you die?”

As the father of a 4-year-old little girl, each day is subject to a host of questions. Some are easy to answer, while others require much reflection and thought. There are times when I simply don’t know – or don’t remember – an answer to her question. At other times I have to decide how to respond. Some of Allie’s questions have inspired entire books, even volumes of books, in search of the answers. As a father, I have to walk a delicate balance between not answering the question in such detail as to surpass my daughter’s present mental development and attention span, which could potentially deter future inquiries, while not ignoring the question and hoping the inquiry simply goes away, and again potentially squelching future questions.

Though there are moments when I feel like I can’t take one more “Why?” question, at the end of the day I am so happy I have an inquisitive child who constantly asks questions and

seeks answers. Her curiosity is inspiring, frustrating, challenging, and exhausting – and thank goodness for that. The inquisitive nature of youth is too often lost in adulthood; however, many of the world’s greatest thinkers have been able to capture this youthful nature and continue to ask big questions throughout their lives. Philosophers, scientists, and theologians constantly seek answers to life’s mysteries. Each answer inspires another question. Although these thinkers all have a different approach and are seeking somewhat different answers, their central quest is the same: to obtain wisdom.

## Part I

### On Philosophy

Philosophy is the love and pursuit of wisdom. For Socrates, “Philosophy begins in wonder” (Frank). Two Greek root words, “philo” meaning “love” and “sophy” meaning “wisdom,” combine to form the word, a study that entails the investigation into the causes and laws that underlie reality. The main tool utilized in philosophical inquiry is that of logic. Through the use of logic and deduction, philosophers critique and analyze mankind’s fundamental beliefs – constantly challenging thought and questioning the answers. Plato called philosophy “the noblest pursuit of all” because the topic dealt with defining such central human concepts as justice, truth, liberty, freedom, beauty, and ethics (Frank). Philosophy has given us metaphysics, ethics, aesthetics, epistemology, and logic. All of these areas have supplied and continue to supply mankind with thought and meaning into the very nature of a life well-lived.

### On Religion

Religion is rooted in “the belief and reverence for a supernatural power or powers

regarded as creator and governor of the universe” (American Heritage). Religion requires a spiritual leader who teaches and prescribes a set of beliefs, values, and practices. According to Henri Amiel, religion is “mystical in its roots and practical in its fruits, a communion with God, a calm and deep enthusiasm, a love which radiates, a force which acts, a happiness which overflows” (Frank). Amiel’s definition certainly rings with a poetic truth. The great religions of the world include Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism, and our world’s great religious leaders have included Buddha, Confucius, Gandhi, Isaiah, Jesus, Mohammad, Moses, and Zoroaster. Religion seeks to provide meaning for this life and often times relates one’s current life experience to future reward or punishment. In the words of Albert Pike, “Religion is the recognition of duty in its necessary harmony with goodness” (717). Above all, religion provides hope.

### On Science

Scientific inquiry is based upon the observation, identification, description, experimental investigation, and theoretical explanation of natural phenomena (American Heritage). Science aims to define and classify all things that compose our environment, and it seeks to explain causes and effects using rational explanations derived through direct observation. To the scientists, there is nothing that cannot be explained; every question has a rational explanation. Branches of scientific thought include botany, biology, anatomy, zoology, astrology, chemistry, ecology, and medicine. Scientific inquiry continues to provide new insights into the understanding of all things material.

### Contrasting Schools of Thought

Philosophy, religion, and science have fundamentally clashed throughout time. Possibly the most common participants in this mental tug-of-war come from the battles between religion and science. The core of religious thought is based upon a belief in a supernatural power, a power that cannot be directly observed or proven to exist using rational experiments. In general, science views religion as naïve and religion views science as short-sighted. Whereas scientists can't understand why a person would want to believe in and follow something he or she cannot prove even exists, religious individuals who are convinced there is a soul that lives beyond the grave cannot understand why a person would give up the rewards of eternity only to seek the knowledge of this temporal existence.

The subject of "creation" provides a clear example of a scientific versus religious view of the world. Religions typically credit the creation of the universe to the deity or chief deity they serve. As an example, in both Christian and Jewish theology the Hebrew God created all that exist over the course of seven days, and each day's progress is described in the book of Genesis. However, that explanation doesn't satisfy the scientists who have questioned, hypothesized, experimented, and deducted the question of how this world came to be. For the scientist, a supernatural power willing the creation of the earth is not only not plausible but defies all logic and reason; regardless of the lack of physical evidence or rational explanation, the theologian looks beyond the details and satisfies himself that his belief is truth.

Though religion and philosophy may not be quite as combative, the two schools certainly have their share of arguments. Like the scientists, philosophers cannot understand living a life based on mere belief unsubstantiated by logical reasoning and rational thought. However, according to religions texts such as the Hermetic books, "Philosophy is nothing else than

striving...to attain knowledge of God” (Frank). Plus, for some religious zealots, the nature of philosophy to question - to even question that which is sacred – is sacrilege. While the philosopher scoffs at the theologian’s willingness to follow a doctrine unproved, the theologian finds it absurd to constantly question what one knows in his heart to be the truth.

This is not to say that religion is full of shallow thought and lack of reason. Many of our world’s greatest thinkers and greatest leaders have been advocates of religion. Why? Despite the answers of science and philosophy, neither school has discovered all the answers. Respected philosophers like Sir Francis Bacon explain that “a little philosophy inclineth man’s mind to atheism, but depth in philosophy bringeth men’s minds about to religion” (Frank). For Louis Kossuth, religion can be defined as “the philosophy of the heart” while philosophy is “the religion of the mind” (Frank). Scientists have not been able to explain the first cause. Though they have theories about how the universe was created, there is no data relating to the beginning – the initial cause. As stated earlier, religion provides hope, and hope leads to happiness. If all we are in the end is food for worms, what’s the point of living a productive, ethical life? Religions hold that answer.

It should also be noted that philosophy and science doesn’t always align either. The subjects of philosophy are hardly observable: right, wrong, love, wisdom, justice, goodness, evil, liberty, honor, beauty. While scientists may appreciate the logical process philosophers employ when examining their subjects, it remains that the nature of these subjects do not lead to fact, and science seeks facts whereas philosophy seeks truth.

When it comes to truth, philosophy and religion have some commonalities. Both realms of thought can appreciate the nature of truth stemming from fictional story, such as

parables. Though not factual, these stories teach fundamental truths for both the philosopher and theologian. As Pike observed, “The failure of fanciful religion to become philosophy does not preclude philosophy from coinciding with true religion” (710). Philosophers can appreciate the purity and goodness of thought found in religion.

And so here we are. Three fields of thought - philosophy, religion, and science – all seeking absolute wisdom through contrasting methods of inquiry and differing fundamental tenants. Which is right? Are any wrong? Is there any way to reconcile the three? Enter the mysteries.

## Part II

The “mystery religions,” “mystery traditions,” or “mysteries” refer to a set of ancient religious societies that practiced initiation ceremonies. In the case of the Mystery Traditions, “mystery” means “to close,” and “closed” refers to the fact that the teachings were kept secret (Meyer 4). Though numerous, the mysteries of Isis, Orpheus, Dionysus, Ceres, and Mithras were the largest and most popular (Pike 352). The Mysteries dealt with topics such as death and resurrection and the reconciliation of opposites (Algeo). Also, topics such as life, love, knowledge and immortality were discussed (Angus 53 & 63).

Mystery traditions such as the Orphic movement are documented in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. (Angus 14). According to Albert Pike, the mysteries traveled from India to Chaldea then to Egypt and Greece (353). The mysteries were especially popular during the time of Alexander the Great (Meyer 3). Alexander ushered in a blend of Eastern and Western thought, opening the minds of individuals to new ideas and concepts. Members of mystery

schools included such educated and influential men as Plutarch, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Julian, Proclus, Plato, Moses, and Pythagoras (Angus 15-16).

With the rise of Christianity in the first century AD, the mystery traditions were heavily scrutinized. However, even before the advent of Christianity the mystery traditions were facing some stiff critiques. Philosophers began questioning the gods' values and morals (Meyer 3). Also, the Roman Empire tried to eradicate the mysteries because they favored a more political and patriotic religious system. In AD 19, Tiberius expelled anyone associated with mystery traditions, including all Orientals and Jews, while also dismantling the Temple of Isis and killing devoted followers (Angus 38). Constantine officially dissolved the mysteries in favor of Christianity. Despite these bans, the mysteries may have survived in Eastern Europe, Northern Spain, and Southern France (Algeo).

Because Christians destroyed the literature and temples dedicated to the mysteries, little is known as to their contents (Angus 41). It seems quite clear, however, that there was no set dogma or "Bible" that the mysteries followed; rather, they relied heavily on the oral tradition (Burkett 72). Thus, the contents of the mysteries likely varied from time to time and from place to place. However, some details have managed to survive.

First, it seems as though anyone was able to participate in the mysteries regardless of ethnicity, political affiliations, or social status (Angus 66). Most traditions were open to men and women alike; however, the mysteries of Mithras were limited to men and were very popular among soldiers (Algeo). The candidates for initiation made a conscious choice to join the order, "join(ing) an association of people united in their quest for personal salvation" (Meyer 4). Candidates need only have been just, upright, and true – people of good morals who kept a

tongue of good report (Clausen 140). Some joined for social reasons, and if so they were not excluded from the group. However, there was also a class of initiates termed “mystai.” It was these individuals that inherited the true secrets and teachings of the mysteries (Meyer 8).

Initiation was central to the mysteries. In general, initiation into the mysteries consisted of three stages: preparation and probation, initiation and communion, and blessedness and salvation. Stage one, or preparation and probation, usually involved an obligation, a time of fasting and/or abstinence, and a pilgrimage (Angus 76-88). After the candidate proved himself during the initial trial, he was formally welcomed and entered into a sacred bond with the Order. However, even after he was made a formal member, there was more to learn. Aristotle believed that the initiate into the mysteries really learned nothing; however, he took an active part in an experience that put him in a certain state of mind – a state that led to wisdom and understanding (Meyer 12). Hence, the third phase of blessedness and salvation was a gradual process that was never truly completed.

What did these mysteries teach that took so long to comprehend? The mysteries all dealt with the three great doctrines of ancient theosophy: God (religion), man (philosophy), and nature (science). They spoke of reason and virtue, of death and eternity, of hidden truths and the perfection of the soul. Despite their time in history, the mysteries were largely monotheistic, teaching that there was but one Supreme God (Pike 357-59). Initiation into the mysteries was an act of “participating in an increasingly intimate union with the Holy,” and they “were designed to illuminate the nature of the Divine through (this) initiatic” experience (Wasserman XI). Plus, the mysteries concealed many of their teachings through symbolism; hence, the initiate was only able “to grasp as much as his mental capacity (could) acquire” (Clausen 140).



Like the mystery traditions, Freemasonry is an initiatic tradition. As the candidates of old, the candidates for the mysteries of Masonry today engage in similar ceremonies and rituals throughout the many rites of the Craft. Freemasonry's rituals involve such practices as lustration, being placed in darkness (and being brought to light), and being presented with symbols and images to contemplate. By and large, our ceremonies adhere to the same three stages of the mystery traditions' initiation ceremonies: preparation and probation, initiation and communion, and blessedness and salvation. Masonic candidates are prepared, presented, and initiated; afterwards, they are taught through lecture and symbolism and instructed that there is still much more to learn.

Masonic candidates join the fraternity for a variety of reasons: social interaction, philanthropic motives, and enlightenment - just to name a few. Likewise, the mystery traditions had a similar membership base. Quite possibly the practice of initiating a variety of individuals from an array of backgrounds stem from those same practices of the ancient mystery traditions.

Further, we see representation of the sun and the moon in our Symbolic Lodges and other Masonic rites. The Masonic East and West are important symbols to the Craft and we see images of the sun and moon displayed on numerous examples of Masonic regalia. Likewise, the sun and moon are represented in mystery traditions such as those of Isis, and for good reason. One of the universal themes and teachings of the mystery schools involves the reconciliation of opposites (Algeo). The sun and moon represent these opposites to both the ancient and modern initiate. Still more examples of opposites exist in Freemasonry. In the Entered Apprentice degree, we become acquainted with the mosaic pavement and learn of the opposites of good and evil, light and dark, and their reconciliation by aid of the Divine, represented by the blazing

star. In the Fellow Craft degree, we find the two pillars representing strength and beauty. The candidate becomes the middle pillar of wisdom, the trait that balances and reconciles the two outside pillars. The Scottish Rite's emblem of the double-headed eagle also teaches of balance, equilibrium, and the reconciliation of opposites.

The Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite deals directly with the mysteries in a way that the York Rite system does not. The traditional timing for Scottish Rite reunions is directly related to our Order's "mystical" heritage. Scottish Rite Degrees 22-27 make up the Rite's "mystery degrees," and each one deals with the nature of the ancient mystery traditions. The 22°, Knight Royal Axe or Prince of Libanus, teaches of work – the value of work. It takes work to unlock the secrets of the mysteries. He who does not value work will never obtain knowledge. The 23°, Chief of the Tabernacle, comes from the Hebrew tradition and teaches that faith should ultimately be valued over philosophy, for philosophy only deals with this life but faith prepares us for the next. In this degree, we take the first step to understanding the Greater Mysteries through the entry point of the Lesser Mysteries. The 24°, Prince of the Tabernacle, speaks of the immortal soul and the belief in one true God, regardless of tradition or name. In this degree the Greater Mysteries are revealed and the essence of universal religion is considered. The 25°, Knight of the Brazen Serpent, causes us to reflect on the Divine through the lens of Islam and astrology. Again, this degree deals with the universal traits of all of the world's great religions. The 26°, Prince of Mercy or Scottish Trinitarian, notes the universality of the sacred trinity and teaches that truth is contained in all of the great religions. Finally, the 27°, Knight of the Sun or Prince Adept, finalizes the teachings of the Mystery Degrees. The degree teaches of balance, faith, and the God's blueprint via nature. Using the knowledge contained in

speculative alchemy, we learn that there is no true death; rather, there is only changing of states. In this summative mystery degree, the overall message is clear, “One Great Being, Infinite and pervading the Universe” is the great unifier of all humanity.

The most important lesson of the Mysteries, and one assuredly reserved for candidates who had proved their ability to truly master her teachings, was the idea of universal religion. Pike alludes to the idea of a universal religion of love repeatedly throughout his work. Other thinkers such as George Bernard Shaw believe “there is only one religion, though there are a hundred versions of it.” In the words of Swami Vivekananda, there “are all so many paths leading to the same goal...the realization of God in the soul. That is universal religion.” Truly, the Mysteries reconciled seemingly complex and differing religious systems by extracting shared, universal truths.

Freemasonry does not reveal her secrets. Rather, the mysteries are contained within the symbols of the Craft. In this manner, Aristotle’s assertion rings true today in the halls of Masonic lodges throughout the world. Like Aristotle, Pike viewed symbols as “a more efficacious instrument of instruction than plain dialectic language (because) we are habitually indifferent to that which is acquired without effort” (Pike 355). Taking part in the ritual makes a member, but contemplating the Craft’s symbols, learning her lessons, and enacting her teaching is what makes him a Mason. Further, as Walter Burkert observes, “(secrecy) cannot really be betrayed because told to the public it would appear insignificant” (Burkett 9).

Although the history of the fraternity certainly has a nicely documented beginning date in 1717, our heritage truly dates back to the time of antiquity – hence, the term “Ancient Craft Masonry.” The founders of the Masonic fraternity relied upon the nature and practices of the

ancient mystery schools to provide binding ceremonies and to teach fundamental universal truths to their members. Freemasonry has kept the traditions of old alive and well in the present, assisting her members in the reconciliation and understanding of our universe.

### Conclusion

Freemasonry and the mysteries that inspired the Order serve to reconcile the ideas of philosophy, religion, and science. Masonry challenges her members to wrestle with the ideas of man's external world, his internal nature, and his spiritual relationship with the Great Architect of the Universe. Masons seek wisdom - the wisdom of our material world and universe; the wisdom of our man's morals, ethics, and values; the wisdom of the Spirit, the Soul, and of God. Freemasonry understands that following a single path of philosophy, religion, or science represents "a kind of journey, ever learning, yet never arriving at the ideal perfection of truth" (Pike 691). The Truth is only found through the study and understanding of all three of these schools; the Truth is found only through the thoughtful analysis of ourselves, our world, and our relationship to the Universal Divine. In this manner, Freemasonry, like the mysteries precluding the Order, reconciles the great questions of mankind and provides her initiates with the wisdom and light they seek.

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