

ESSAY FOR THE 16° Scottish Rite College of the Consistory

Wallace Saval, Ed. D.

Assistant Professor (Adjunct)

Department of History and Philosophy

Virginia State University

June 17, 2015

ESSAY QUESTION #1: The three answers can be seen as symbolizing three different common but unproductive life-style or value system. None of these lead to autonomy as an adult, responsible man. Discuss the problem in living to which each of the three can lead, and suggest, in each case, what the follower of truth—the truly autonomous man, would do or how he would react.

THE SITUATION

The 16° picks up where the 15° leaves off. The Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar II had destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem and taken the Jews into captivity in Babylon. By 539 BCE Babylonia had been subsumed into the Persian Empire. The following year the Persian Empire's king, Darius the Great agreed to allow the Jewish captives to return to Judah and granted them permission to rebuild the Temple. Cyrus makes Zerubbabel a Prince of Jerusalem and agrees to support him and the returning Jews in their efforts to rebuild the Temple.

Over the next twenty odd years Zerubbabel and his returning captive work to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. Their efforts, however, have been thwarted by attacks from groups apposed to the reconstruction of the Temple. So much so that they must keep a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other. At the urging of the prophet Haggai, Zerubbabel and his companians return to the Persian court. In the intervening years Cyrus has been killed in battle and two others rulers had lead the Persian Empire. The present ruler was Darius the Great. Before being granted an audience with Darius, they must first answer to a question from the king: "Which is stronger, wine, women, or the king? (more about this questions to follow)" Zerubbabel answers that truth was the strongest of all things. Their answers merited admittance to the court of the king.

Zerubbabel informed Darius, that Cyrus had decreed that not only had the captive Jews the right to return to Judah and rebuild their temple, but he committed the support of the crown to that end. Obviously that support, i.e., resources and protection, had not been forthcoming. Darus knew nothing of this decree, but ordered a search be untaken immediately. Sure enough Cyrus's original decree was found. One might think that Darius might say, "look Zerubbabel, I'm not sure I was even born when that decree was issued. I have no intention of

honoring it.” After all Darius was the king of the largest empire in the known world and his power was absolute.

In the Persian Empire royal decrees, however, were sacrosanct. They could not be change in any way neither by the issuing king nor by any subsequent king. Royal decrees in the modern world would be classified as *categorical imperatives*; they were absolute, unconditional requirements that must be obeyed. With this in mind Darius promised royal support in material and human resources. In addition, he decreed that any hinderng of their work on the rebuilding of the temple would result in severe punishment.

As a result of their efforts in the court of King Darius, Zerubbabel and his companions returned to Jerusalem where they were able to begin work in earnest on the rebuilding of the temple.

THOUGHTS ON POSSIBLE ANSWER TO THE QUESTIION PUT TO INDIVIDUALS REQUESTING AUDIENCE WITH THE PERSIAN KING

WINE

First of all let’s modernize the term from wine to SPIRITS AND DRUGS. I think we would be less then honest if we failed to recongnize the power and strength of SPIRITS AND DRUGS. Just the number of deaths caused by drunk drivers, and the number of individuals and families that have been effected by alcoholism is staggering. In fact, my extended family has been significantly effected by alcoholism. I have personally seen the effect of it on the individuals, but on their children as well.

Drugs are no less devistating than alcohool. I attended ligh school during the last half of the 1950’s. In our junior and senior years we were required to write a lot of essays and short stories. The student and sometimes the teacher would read these papers to the class. I had a friend that was a superb writer. He got accepted to a first tier university and I just knew that he was going to be the next great American author. He got involved with drugs. I have only seen him once since our college years. He definitely was not the same person. Drugs changed him. It was like a part of him wasn’t there anymore. From time to time his older sister would place ads in local newspapers asking if he had been seen to please notify the family. So yes SPIRITS AND DRUGS are very powerful and strong with many negative connotations.

Don’t get me wrong I am not condeming the use of SPIRITS AND DRUGS out of hand. Most people drink responsibly. In my little town of a Friday or Saturday night starting around 9:30 PM our local taxicab service is kept busy takong folks home. No body wants a DUI. I don’t know about where you live but in Virginia the alcohol level is so low that just sniffing the bottle can get you a DUI. In addition, in Virginia you will serve several days in jail and the cost are prohibative. By the time its all over the cost run very close to ten thousand dollars.

Finally, SPIRITS AND DRUGS have no strength or power. A bottle of fine, ninety-five proof, Kentucky Bourbon can set on the shelf for a thousand years, and no one will ever be able to say it was the reason my car ran into a tree, or ran over a child. The strength is not in the bottle of bourbon but in the person that uncorks the bottle.

WOMEN

First of all let me say that I love women. I have lived with the same woman for over forty-five years and she has given me two beautiful daughters; and, I am here to tell you that women are strong, very strong both physically and emotionally. It seems to me that women are getting stronger and stronger. The Top Gun annual competition for Navy fighter pilots is now often being won by female jet jockeys.

My marriage could best be described as seventy/thirty, with my wife being responsible for seventy percent and me thirty percent. This no longer flies. I have three boys all married. Their marriages are fifty/fifty. They change diapers without being asked to, they help with the meal preparation, they know how to run a vacuum and clear toilet. Today's women are much more the equal partner in their marriages than in the past. Finally, a brother Mason told me of attending an Entered Apprentice initiation; when the candidate was asked in whom he placed his faith he answered, "My Wife." That says it all. Finally, the Sunday New York Times Business section features a Q and A with a leading C. E. O. Each Sunday. Frequently the C. E. O. is a woman.

Some of us may know of certain men that seem to have turned their entire lives over to their wife or mothers and seem to us unable to think for themselves. Such men are called variously "Mamma's Boys" or "Hen Pecked Husbands." These individuals are deemed to weak to make a decision on their own. It is important to remember, however, that in the time of the Persian Empire, women had three primary purposes—pleasure, procreation, and motherhood. Nonetheless, I am sure there were among the vast population of the Persian Empire some "Hen Pecked Husbands" and "Momma's Boys."

KING

There are no modern day comparisons to the kings of old. The one exception may be the King of Saudi Arabia. The days of absolute monarchs are over. In the days of Cyrus and Darius, the king could order the death of any person that offended him. In other words, nothing was stronger than the king. Which begs the question of why the king would use two symbols of weakness such as wine and women, unless he expected the answer to be the king. I guarantee you that Zerubbabel's companions all answered—the king. This is my firm belief.

In the days of Cyrus and Darius as today there were and are "yes" men. Those that agree with anything the leader says. The wise leader is the one that will look for the adviser that does not always agree with the leader, but speaks his own mind. Perhaps this was the real motive that Darius had in asking the question to

those seeking an audience with him. He was looking for an individual that thinks outside the box. When Darius heard Zerubbabel's answer—Truth—he knew at once that he was about to meet just such a person.

TRUTH

When Zerubbabel's answer was revealed, Darius knew this was an individual that thought for himself. He knew that he should listen to Zerubbabel, as he was a man that could be depended upon to speak the truth without reservation. Truth is very important to all of us. We constantly are in search for the truth. Gotthold Lessing wrote that "The true value of a man is not determined by his possession, supposed or real, of truth, but rather by his sincere exertion to get to the truth." Many believe as Cicero did that "Our minds possess by nature an insatiable desire to know the truth." Zerubbabel could have used other words instead, he could have said that nature is the strongest or even that God is the strongest, but he chose truth. Perhaps he believed as Pythagoras did that truth is so great a perfection, that if God would render himself visible to men, he would choose light for his body and truth for his soul.