

A Simple Tragedy

When they take you before synagogues and before rules and authorities,
do not worry about how or what your defense will be or about what you
are to say. For the holy Spirit will teach you at that moment what you
should say.

--Luke 12:11-12

My dog has not eaten in two days. The veterinarian (a very kindly and exceptionally intelligent woman, lest what I say next out of raw emotion somehow attacks her integrity) has just rattled off the prognosis, but now hems and haws over what to do next. Sensing her reluctance to say what must be said, I eventually cut in.

"I do not have unlimited funds to keep her alive just because science can make it happen. I am concerned over her quality of life. If the steroid treatment you spoke of has potential, then let's try it. Otherwise..."

Despite finding my command voice from my Army days, I still can't say what both of us are obviously thinking.

I have raised her from within days of her trying solid food, which turned out to be the hay in the barn she was born in (very likely the first time I saved her life). We've been through a lot since then, and it's been obvious over the years that she loves me more than her own life. Even if this treatment works, it is equally obvious that our time together is limited. And because of the over-reaction to the Covid "threat," I fear I would be denied the chance to be with her if she needs to be "put down." But to think of that is a distraction, and I have some tough choices to make that, in simpler times, would not have to be made.

Earlier in my lifetime, my choices would have been simple: her life would be measured in days, not months, and defined by how much pain she would endure. Putting her down would be a clear cut case of mercy. Science and technology have allowed our pets to live much longer lives, but often at exorbitant prices. Discussions on quality of life are needed more than ever, yet such discussions seem to be almost non-existent. They seem to be limited to "if you love her, money should not be an issue," and balanced by "she's only a dog." Something is missing.

When Hannah Arendt (herself a Jew who escaped the Holocaust by being fortunate enough to leave Europe) observed the Adolph Eichmann trial, she described the banal (simple) nature of Eichmann as "Gedankenlosigkeit," which properly translated means "inability to think." For this, she was vehemently accused of justifying Eichmann's actions. But this was not the case. She was actually pointing out that evil is not, as often presented, a "thing", but rather the *absence* of a "thing." What Eichmann did was not inherently evil. As he described it, it was only middle management work. What made it evil was that he didn't think (or care) what this work was really about, or the results of it.

Atheists have often asked me how Hell can be real if God didn't create it. Jews and Christians have often used various symbols of light to describe "truth," "God" and other similar concepts. It is a well chosen symbol and can easily be taught to non-Christians. "Light" is a thing; darkness is the absence of it. All the darkness in the universe cannot hide the smallest lit candle, yet the same candle can illuminate large portions of darkness. Light is a thing and is real; darkness is not a thing yet is still

real. Truth is a thing and is real, deceit is not a thing, but rather a rejection of what is real, and yet is itself still real. One of the great mysteries of the Christian faith is how something cannot be a thing and yet still be real. I don't know *how* these things are possible (hence the mystery), yet I know them to be true.

It's the absence of something that makes me feel guilty. I don't know what is the cause of this problem. I don't know how much it will cost to fix. I don't know if it can be fixed. I don't know at what point I will have to choose between her life and how much I am willing to pay. I don't know if it will come to this. I don't know how any "fix" will affect her quality of life. I don't know how long she would live no matter how much money I spent on her treatments. If it does come to euthanasia, I don't know how terrified she will be in her final moments, especially if I can't be with her. Certainly, these uncertainties are not sins in themselves. But they are an absence of something (information in particular), and therefore resemble sin.

But it is the Devil himself that makes this connection for me. I have been lured into thinking I am in a moral dilemma, torn between two sinful choices on what to give up (my money or her life). But this is a ruse. My real sin is not in the choices I will make in the future; it is the choice I made just now: trying to come up with my plan while ignoring God's plan. It is not for me to worry about the future, it is for me to do the best I can with the present. I can implement the therapy the veterinarian prescribed. What happens during the follow-up visit in a few days will be the time for all this extra stuff, which may or may not happen.

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Original Publication Date: 16 December 2020