

The Dignities and the Dangers of Doubt



Caravaggio

Matthew 28:16-20

28:16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

28:17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.

28:18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

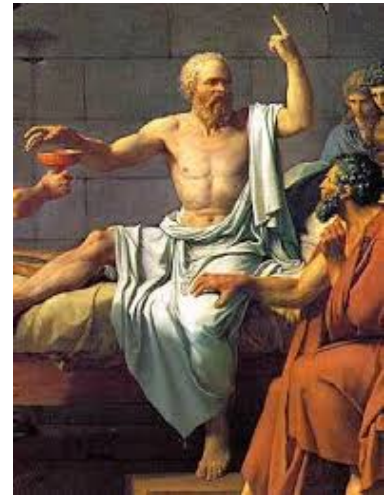
28:20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Midrash on Matthew 28:16-20

When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted (Matthew 28:17).

For Socrates doubt was essential for the contemplation of

truth. This early Greek capacity to cast a skeptical eye upon



Jacque-Louis David

everything, including the gods, was really an early manifestation of modernist skepticism and the brilliance of the scientific method. Socrates taught his students to question everything, particularly the assumptions, values, and beliefs that formed their worldviews. One of his students writes about walking around in a stupor for three days, after undergoing Socrate's questioning of everything he had assumed was true about his world and what he believed to be true. He ends up in a state which the Greeks called *aporia*—literally translated as “without passage”.

I've known this condition. I've written elsewhere about being unceremoniously cast into a state of *aporia* after watching the film *Being There*. The film, which explores how people begin to believe that Chauncey, a simple gardner, is actually the Messiah, caused me to question all of my beliefs in my last year of seminary. I found myself opening up to the possibility that four years of study had revolved around a simple Galilean whom a few (pathetic) believers thought was the Messiah. I ended up in a condition of *aporia*, riding the Toronto subway line, back and forth, back and forth—without passage and going nowhere fast. I was stunned into a condition of unknowing.

It's not pleasant, I can assure you, to have everything you believe go "poof". There you are, naked to the world without your armour of beliefs to defend you against the fast approaching hoards of meaninglessness. But, of course, aporia was precisely what the doctor ordered before I was allowed to inflict my arrows of certainty upon the poor souls in the pew. There is nothing worse than listening to somebody drone on, teaching you about the way things are. And, as George Bernard Shaw put it: "Any belief worth having must survive doubt."

Aporia is meant to temporarily stop you in your tracks—to immobilize the true believer long enough to start thinking for herself. It's good and right that we should be stunned by doubt. This is a liminal state. We find ourselves between destinations, actually with no place to go. We are in intellectual and emotional limbo. It's both a crucifixion of certainty and a kind of purgatory—a holding place where our fate is being determined. The desire to resolve this condition prematurely is strong. We are tempted to rush back to the community of true believers, find reassurance from our favourite author, or double-down and believe even more vociferously, holding this intrusion as the work of Satan. Alternatively, if we are in power, say an institution like the church, we might start lighting the kindling to deal with the likes of Giordano Bruno, who was burned at the stake in 1600 for threatening to send the priests into a state of aporia.

In the film Trilogy, *The Matrix*, Morpheus is the true believer. He believes that the Messiah, (Neo), has come to save Zion



Don Michael, Jr.

from the Matrix and the Machines. If you just watch the first in the series, you find yourself siding with Morpheus, against the unbelievers, who think that all this talk about a Messiah is nonsense. Morpheus is the hero who believes against all the odds. But the writers of the Trilogy, (The Wachowsky brothers) are too smart to let this simple, Manichean dualism stand—that is, Matrix bad/Revolution good; Morpheus and his band of believers good/the unbelievers bad. By the time the second film rolls around, the rug is pulled out from under us, which is why the American audiences were so disappointed. They couldn't tolerate the ambiguity. They refused to suffer *aporia*. (Take note, *aporia* is medicine for whole cultures, not just individuals, especially those nations whose founding identity is based upon a Messianic myth of being “a light unto the nations”). Morpheus has to contend with Neo's own profound doubts about his identity, and ultimately it all comes tumbling down for poor Morpheus.

But wait! Neo realizes that he's *not* the one they have been waiting for, but he *is* the one who feels called to find a new and different solution to the ensuing war. Hmm... Confusion, ambiguity, complexity. What's this!? I want my action movies straight up, good guys prevail, and bad guys get there just reward. As a result of his willingness, Neo looks, smells, and acts like a Messiah figure, but in truth he's just doing what life conditions require, and choosing to step up. One of the captains of the ship chooses to risk her life for the

mission, not because she *believes* that Neo is the Messiah, but rather because she believes in *him*—that he is the person for the job at this particular moment in time. So, there is this shift from believing in an *ideology* of Messiahship, to believing in the direct experience of the person of the one who is showing enough courage to take the lead. The new and exceptional powers that are evoked in Neo as a result of his willingness to lead introduces another layer of complexity. The guy can see subtle energy fields, fight off armies of Smiths. And in the end, he empties himself, dies and brings peace. Is he or isn't he a Messiah?

When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted (Matthew 28:17).

We can all perhaps agree that Jesus would not desire to be worshiped. In fact, as a practicing Jew he would regard this as blasphemy. Undoubtedly, this is the editor of Matthew's gospel revealing the agenda of the early church. Still, without believing the Jesus is the Messiah, one can affirm that although in his own mind, he wasn't fulfilling an ideological role that was laid upon him, he nevertheless acted in a healing, even a redemptive way—redeeming and elevating what it means to be human.

Jesus represents the in-breaking of a new kind of human, which has the effect of lifting the whole of the human condition to a higher energetic level, and by extension, lifting the whole cosmos to a higher realization, or fuller flowering, of the divine life. He is imbued with exceptional powers for healing, for precognition, and seeing the G_d/Wholeness everywhere, and in every one. To "worship" (i.e. to be worthy of allegiance) Jesus is to "believe" that he represents a new possibility for what it means to be human, a new possibility that is meant to be realized in each of us. I believe it. He's the not-Messiah, who acts like a Messiah—the one we had been expecting and continue to expect (as the future human latent within each of us).



Bamberg Apocalypse 11th century

(In a future post I will talk about how the figure of the “son of man”, that enigmatic title that Jesus seemed to have preferred and which still baffles scholarship, may help us to frame his life.)

In conclusion, aporia is an evolutionary no-man’s land that we occupy when doubt has had its way with us. Being willing to undergo this condition is an evolutionary practice. The spiritual life is not about believing the right things, believing doctrine, believing the teachings of the church, or believing in any of the historic doctrines about Jesus. (But neither is there any good reason to reject them simply because they now have attained the status of doctrine. There is often much hidden wisdom).

On the other hand, a denomination like mine, which certainly wouldn’t be caught dead worshiping Jesus, is perilously close to worshiping doubt. We need to keep in mind that the meaning of aporia is “without passage”. Doubt, languished in, cripples. It immobilizes. It can turn us into cynics, pessimists, and depressives. It is meant to disorient, yes, but that means by definition it is a shitty compass. You can get stuck in limbo, which is a kind of purgatory.

It seems to me that contemporary, Western culture is living “without passage” as a permanent condition. Which is to say, that we are living without a coherent narrative. Beliefs are a sub-category of, and in service to, a big story we tell ourselves (mostly unconsciously) about what is real, what matters, how we interpret the events of our lives, where it’s all going, and how we should believe. These narratives are world views. Late postmodernist philosophy (itself a narrative) is deeply suspicious of grand narratives. But to be human is to make and tell stories. The grand narratives just go underground when we stop telling them and imagine that the associated beliefs have been exorcised. The underground narrative of our culture, supported by a complex of beliefs, and institutional girders, is materialism.

Post-modernist philosopher, Frederic Jameson posits “not the disappearance of the great master-narratives but their passage underground, as it were, their continuing, but now unconscious effectivity as a way of ‘thinking about and acting in our current situation’”. (I picked this up from a book, [*Narratives of Human Evolution*](#), by Misia Landau, who convincingly shows how paleoanthropologists derive their conclusions, not from the facts of science, but from their particular rendering of the archetypal hero myth).

The goal isn’t to live without any beliefs. I know that this is a fundamental tenet of a lot of new age spirituality. But, I’m not sure it’s possible to live without beliefs associated with the big narratives. The goal is to uncover the narrative that is driving our life, and to make conscious the underlying beliefs that are in support of that narrative. Doubt that issues in aporia can help us to push the pause button, so that we might examine how our core narratives are working for us, and then get about the business of being more mindful of the narratives and the beliefs that are living us.

Seeing as there are so various families buying online and likewise exploring the internet market place, it has become increasingly famous to purchase medications online. So the next question is where can you get info that is reliable. You can find useful information fleetly and conveniently by going online. The most common sexual problems in men are erectile disfunction and ejaculation disorders. A lot of doctors think about "[levitra cost](#)". Did learned some about "[buy levitra online usa](#)"? Other matter we are going to is "[buy generic levitra online](#)". In effect, a medicinal reviews found that up to three quarters of folk on such drug experiment side effects. Luckily, most cases of sexual dysfunction are treatable, so it is momentous to share your concerns with your associate and physician. Today, there are many options for men who suffer from erectile malfunction. Get emergency help if you have any of these signs of a side effect to this curing. Talk to your heartiness care provider to see if it's sure to make the switch.