



“Thirteen Conversations About One Thing”

Some Reflections & Possible Avenues of Philosophical Exploration

DISTRICT ATTORNEY (“Troy”- *Matthew McConaughey*)

- Very Black & White (*Either-Or*) View of the World

- Luck is a *non-sequitor* (an untruth) or a non-starter

- [Conversation at bar w/Gene]: “The difference between me and your friend who won the lotto, is that I earned it. Luck is a lazy man’s excuse” (*Sidebar: We get a glimpse into the fact that he was likely born with a silver spoon in his mouth*)
- [Various statements throughout]: There are consequences to actions, must pay the price, take responsibility. No ifs ands or butts. I’m happy I got a low-life off the street.
- [Closing statement at bar w/ Gene pre-accident]: “If there really is luck...if it does exist, I hope I’m lucky enough to recognize it when it comes my way.”
- [A statement made to his colleagues/friends]: “Fuck guilt!”

- Life changing event (hitting Beatrice) that has him questioning his view of the world & manifests behaviors somewhat in line with his deeper beliefs about responsibility & punishment.

- [Personal Behaviors]: Stops driving, cuts himself over and over again in the same spot he hit his head (reminder/punishment), extreme guilt and cognitive dissonance
- [Fast-forward to the conversation between him and his colleague/friend]: What if you can do something for the girl. I can’t. Yes, you can. Sometimes people get lucky...sometimes they’re given a second chance.
- [Conversation w/ Criminal that He’s Prosecuting]: Provides a parallel experience with what he has been struggling with and a further glimpse into

the role of luck in one's life...and possibly, too, the role of mercy (for others and self).

Some Questions to Explore

- (1) What does luck have to do with happiness, if anything? What do we mean by luck (e.g., events, how one grew up, opportunities, color of your skin, intelligence level, physical prowess)?
- (2) Might the awareness of the role that luck plays facilitate humility and, if so, is this yet another factor in /for happiness (Are arrogant people more happy? Less happy?)
- (3) Is a more balanced (less black & white/either-or) view of the world related or even, possibly, a *critical* aspect of happiness?

PHYSICS TEACHER ("Walker" - John Turturro)

- Pretty Black & White View (in his own way)

- Current of "disconnection" with the world that runs through his veins accompanied by a desire to "not go softly into the light"

- [Conversation w/ soon to be ex-wife]: People often lie to make others happy....to which he responds, "ignorance is bliss."
- [Conversation w/ colleague with whom he's having an affair]: You set me free from a life of predictability and routine...same time, same place next week.
- [Conversation w/ students]: There are no "if's"...Physics are an exact science; the laws of the universe are absolute.

- Life changing event (separation from wife & student dying) forces him to grapple more deeply with happiness (or a lack thereof) & manifests continued behaviors in line with being disconnected from reality

- [Conversation w/ student]: Why do you want to be a doctor? So you can prolong their misery.

- [Conversation w/ shrink]: I've always thought of contentment as a form of resignation...of accepting the status quo...of giving up.
 - Sidebar: "All my stuff is at my wife's, we'll "reconnect" again." (No – stuff was sold a while back, not reality)!

Some Questions to Explore

- (1) How might *truth* be related to happiness? Can one truly be ignorant *and* happy? Or does happiness require that we are both aware of and dealing with reality (not false realities)?
- (2) What is the difference between happiness and contentment? Can you have one without the other?

INSURANCE CLAIMS MANAGER ("Gene" - Alan Arkin)

- **Consistently viewed others and the world around him as a "threat" to his "self" (ego/me-centric)**
- **Vengeful streak coupled with some envy issues**
- **Believed in luck but felt that he got the short-end of the stick (probably better translated as "felt unheard & undervalued")**

- [Conversation w/ colleague at office]: I don't believe he's happy; I think he's hiding something...How do you look at other people's misery all day & come back happy? Sounds like your jealous! I'm not jealous of this guy. He's average...he has no vision and no drive. I just don't like him.
- [Conversation w/ colleague at office]: \$10 bucks says I can wipe the smile off his face. I'm gonna fire him...The Lord giveth & taketh away. Let's see if his happy thing is all an act.

- **Life changing event (fires worker who still maintains a positive outlook) forces him to come to terms with his own unhappiness and frustration(s), as well as take the first steps to move beyond his "self" to another by trying to "right his wrong" via his recco for his ex-wifes husband to hire the worker he fired.**

- [Conversation w/ colleague at bar]: The judge said that faith is the antithesis of truth. But you still have to have faith in something, right? (*Gene softens and talks about what life might have been like if he made different choices, if he waved...would things be different – reflection on choices made/not made*). Life only makes sense when you look at it backwards...but we can only live it forwards. (*Sidebar: Direct reference to Kierkegaard who said “Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forward” – is a really interesting statement in itself about reflection, meaning, and the human condition*)

Some Questions to Explore

- (1) Is the ability to see & embrace happiness contingent upon our *own* happiness (state of being)? Can we put on rose-colored glasses if we are not feeling particularly “rosey” and, if so, is there value in doing so?
- (2) What role does the ego (a “me-centric” modus operandi) play in happiness? If we feel that “our selves” are constantly being threatened by everything and everyone around us, does happiness have room to breathe? Does happiness require a thick skin?
- (3) Can you be vengeful and happy at the same time? Or is the happiness one might feel not really happiness but something else?

HOUSECLEANER (“Beatrice” - Clea DuVall)

- **Open-heart(ed) perspective about the world**
- **Everything has meaning or a reason behind it**
- **Service-oriented**
- **Surrender of control to the “powers that be” (God)**

- [Conversation w/ workmate]: What would you do with a lot of money like that? I would probably give you some.
- [Conversation w/ workmate]: Maybe it seems like life is unfair but we don’t what’s up ahead. Amazing things happen all of the time! (She shares her miracle story, vision, etc.)

- Life changing event (hit by lawyer guy in street & badly injured and implicitly accused of stealing by wealthy guy/client) leaves her questioning her worldview

- [Conversation w/ neighbor boy]: What happened to you, anyway? A car hit me. Why? Because I was in the way. (*Technically, still in the life is fair stage...and then the needle flips once she's accused of stealing by her client/crush*)
- [Conversation w/ workmate]: You were right, life isn't fair. I thought about why I got hit by a car, why I was on the corner, why the shirt blew out of my hands,...then I realized that there is no reason. My eyes have been opened, I can never go back. *Now I'm like everyone else.*

- Life changing event (sees a man smile despite her attempt to focus on the ugly) brings her back

- [Conversation w/ workmate]: For a while I couldn't see a thing good no matter where I looked. And then, I just couldn't take it anymore. I gave up; I surrendered. I picked a man and stared at his face...and thought about how selfish people were. He looked right back at me and smiled. Just like that he broke the spell.

Some Questions to Explore

- (1) What role might "service to others" play in our happiness?
- (2) What role might faith play in happiness? Are people who believe religious-based conceptions of a higher being (or set of higher beings) happier than those who don't? Or is it something else related to this belief in a higher power that facilitates happiness (e.g., religion can provide a sense of order, certainty, meaning, etc.)?
- (3) Is it important for our happiness to give up the idea of "being able to control" everything and constantly trying to "find meaning and reasons for everything"?
- (4) How does our conception of fairness relate to our happiness? If we see life as inherently unfair, can we still be happy?