

Taming of the Scrooge: Not Another Cinderella Story

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The body is the temple of the soul. The human body and our conscience can often be associated with two opposing forces: the angel and the devil. It is often portrayed in make-believe stories, fairytales, and exaggerated films, however, the metaphorical idea of an angel resting on one shoulder while a devil stands on the other holds true in many phases and aspects of life. As a child growing up, my grandmother often told me to always listen to my guardian angel, and she will guide me in the right direction. The philosophical idea of ontology can be related to these inner "voices" that many humans obtain and rely on in order to reach synthesis and divine dignity. Moral intention, which is displayed in traditional creation stories, can be associated with the "angel" and the actions and characteristics of those who believe in striving to reach heaven the ultimate spiritually sacred destination. On the other hand, the subject of immoral inclination can be associated with the "devil" and devious actions displayed in stories in which lead to egotistical actions, thus causing one to ignore the thoughts and feelings of others to reach their goals. Although we cannot escape the devil and the evil thoughts that embark in our minds, we can, however, find a balance to break free from evil actions. Finding this coincidence of opposites, or synthesis, can be reached much easier if one makes the best of a situation, has faith in oneself, and believes in others around them. I feel that the answer to the question of ontology, which is "What exists?" is much more complex than just the simple answer of "we, humans, exist on earth." Although creation stories take place in the distant past when society had yet to fully develop and stories were told traditionally to teach lessons of morality, they can be closely related to classic well-known stories that still live on today. The classic story "A Christmas Carol" contains many relatable characters and themes that surprisingly relate to traditional and non-traditional creation stories.

The ontological question "What constitutes the identity of a subject?" can be explained when one displays moral intention and immoral inclination. Human existence is complex and can easily be transformed to animal-like habits of evil and monstrous behaviors that alter the process of reaching divine dignity and synthesis through ceremony. For many individuals, the rise of fame, power, or authority can be a test to determine how one manages to maintain a balance between gaining either egotistic arrogance or doing the opposite and using their success as inspiring intellect to help strengthen others.

It is up to us whether or not we want to listen to the "voice" or "guardian angel" whispering to us on our shoulder, or if we go on living to ignore this figure.

Kass's Leon interpretation of Joseph's Descent into Egypt, tells of a "fabulous rags-to-riches Egyptian career." Joseph is at first a slave in the Potiphar's house and gradually rises to become chief overseer. The story depicts the progress Joseph makes and how he fails to realize the inner voice (the Lord) guiding the way for him and bringing him the skill he needed to progress in the household. Kass describes Joseph's entrance into Egypt as a "descent" because Joseph is taken in as a slave to an Egyptian man referred to as his "master." However, "the Lord was with Joseph" Kass writes and "as a result he rises and prospers." This part of the story, I feel, illustrates traditional ontology, which is the theory of the true nature of being and the philosophical idea of existence. According to traditional ontology, existence is a transformation process and there is no way of extinguishing vitality and divine dignity. Joseph is finding the balance between what is true reality (hypostasis) while finding a new entity and a way to break free from slavery (synthesis). In the Genesis stories, there is a tendency of wanting to overstate the idea of death and surrendering the ability to make decisions for oneself. Kass writes of God placing "an expiration date" on us, however, one should never ignore the phases of ontology.

Joseph, was at first a spoiled arrogant young man; however, he matures, grows wiser, prospers, and eventually becomes the savior of his people.

The story of Joseph being brought to Egypt is not the average “Cinderella” story one may be used to hearing. The story involves guilt, temptation, evil, and monstrous behavior. However, I feel that Cinderella’s evil step sisters from the classic tale can resemble Joseph’s brothers in the story of Genesis 37:23, thus making the fairytale somewhat of a metaphor for Joseph’s story. For example, the text describes Joseph seeking his brothers and finding them in Dothan. Joseph’s brothers were aware of Joseph’s ambitious and triumphant dreams, calling him the “dream-master”, and they plotted to kill him as a result of their jealous rage. These feelings of jealousy and temptation can relate to the classic Cinderella story of the wicked step sisters discovering that Cinderella wished to attend the royal ball with hopes of meeting the handsome prince. Much like Joseph’s brothers, the step sisters still keep in mind she is their sister and they must refrain from murdering their own “blood.” The brothers feel shame because they have not received the attention and favoritism that Joseph had received from their father, Jacob. Immoral inclination is displayed in the brothers’ actions as they blame their brother and his success for their jealous shame. In Cinderella, the representation of Joseph’s father, I feel, would be the handsome prince. Jacob and the prince are symbolic for ceremony and divine dignity because the characters in the stories strive to gain their attention and they are the forces that drive their ultimate decision making.

The story of Cinderella differs in that Cinderella is dangerous and a threat to her stepsisters because she catches the attention of the handsome prince. The stepsisters seek to control Cinderella just as Joseph’s brothers plot to kill him in an effort to gain attention and recognition from their father. A combination of moral intention and immoral inclination are displayed in both stories when Joseph’s brothers and Cinderella’s stepsisters intentionally hurt their sibling out of jealousy. This secretive and egocentric way of hurting their sibling displays immoral inclination because they seek to gain control over someone else. Both the brothers and the stepsisters disguise their shame with sin and place the shame on their sibling for winning over the father (in Joseph’s story) and (in Cinderella) the prince.

Joseph looks to the Lord for strength, guidance, and inspiration when he is made a slave to his “master.” He trusts in the Lord and feels comfortable knowing that he is with him through the difficult time. The Lord that Joseph looks to for strength, I feel, can be represented in the Cinderella classic tale as the fairy godmother. The fairy godmother grants Cinderella her wish to attend the ball and gives her the confidence she needs to face her step sisters, outshining them to win over the handsome prince. In Genesis, Joseph’s dream offends his brothers because they feel that he is arrogant and braggadocios about his skill and favoritism from his father. A moment of exigency is displayed as the brothers feel offended by his telling of the dream and they plot to kill Joseph. The dream, relating to the story of Cinderella, can be represented by Cinderella’s desire to dance with the prince at the royal ball. The stepsisters plot to hurt (not kill in the Disney classic) Cinderella in an effort to have the prince to themselves.

Joseph’s ontology and how he manages sin can also relate to Charles Dickens' 1843 classic novel, *A Christmas Carol*. Ebenezer Scrooge, the focal character of is an angry, elderly man living his life for only himself, with not a care in the world of others around him. Dickens refers to Scrooge as "... a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner!" He despises the Christmas season and lacks the joy and happiness the season brings to the people of his town. The monstrous man overworks his employees in his money-lending business, rejects holiday party invitations, and turns away charitable workers seeking donations

for the poor. In the story of *A Christmas Carol*, we learn of the shame that Scrooge hides behind and the struggle of finding his “ideal self” is portrayed as the story unfolds. He meets the “ghosts of Christmas’s past who teach him what his life would be like if he had chosen alternate paths and made kind decisions. Scrooge learns how his negative attitude and self-centered arrogance has impacted others and he sees the “sin” in his everyday life. Ebenezer Scrooge, I feel, is a clear example of how one may hide and cover up the idealized self. Scrooge knows and is aware that he has the potential to be a kind soul and inside he wants to feel joy and love during the Christmas season, but he finds it much easier to push all of those aspects of life aside.

This classic story can relate to the idea of sin and how ontology can alter sinful acts. Scrooge made a choice to hate Christmas and alienate himself from others around him who enjoyed the joy that the holiday season brings. In “The Beginning of Wisdom”, Kass explains the meaning of human existence in the chapter titled “The Follies of Freedom and Reason.” He writes: “To be a human being means that judgments of good and bad are always in one’s mental garden, no more than a thought away.” Scrooge, in the classic story, holds false judgments on what is “good” and blames others and the world around him for his own feelings of sinful shame. According to Kass, “Shame is the painful response to a self-consciously recognized gap between our idealized self-image and the truth about ourselves.” Just like in the stories of Joseph, Scrooge faces a struggle between his potential and ideal self. God, according to Kass, represents our idealized self and potential to do “the right thing.” Scrooge displays immoral inclination by blaming others for his misery. Like Joseph’s brothers and Cinderella’s sisters, Scrooge takes out his negativity on others who have not done him any wrong, just as Kass describes immoral inclination blaming God for our troubles.

Kass describes humans as being created with “a tree of knowledge” of good and bad, and Scrooge and Joseph’s brothers both display sin with false knowledge of what they believe is good and bad. Joseph loses sight of God and begins to sin while thinking he is invincible with authority and power. In contrast, Scrooge loses sight of the important aspects of life and loses the memorable time, love and relationships with special people in his life. Self-awareness emerges for Scrooge in the story as he is visited by the ghost of his business partner, Jacob Marley, who had died seven years earlier on Christmas Eve. Like Scrooge, Marley had spent his life hoarding his wealth and exploiting the poor, and as a result is damned to walk the Earth for eternity bound in the chains of his own greed. Marley warns Scrooge that he risks meeting the same fate, and that as a final chance at redemption he will be visited by three spirits of Christmas: Past, Present, and Yet-to-Come. The three spirits, I feel, can relate to Kass’s story of God and the serpent. The serpent’s questions for God, much like the ghosts of Scrooge’s past, are “disturbing immediate participation in life and forcing introspection and reflection” and force the character to self-reflect and consider how his actions are affecting others.

The ghosts of his past force Scrooge to question his morals, actions, and attitude by showing him flashbacks of his childhood, past holidays, and the present and he begins to see the mistakes he has made and the shame he has hidden away subconsciously. According to the story, the serpent’s question to the woman “introduce the issue of truth and falsehood and, what’s more, provokes the desire to correct error.” Scrooge begins to open up his mind to what is real and moral, therefore results in his efforts to correct his mistakes while he still holds a chance for forgiveness. Kass explains this concept: “Questions about oneself necessarily summon one to reflect- to look back- upon oneself and to discover oneself as a being that thinks.” Before the visits of the ghosts of Christmas’s past, Scrooge did not believe he had a purpose and he had no desire to reach divine dignity, while believing in a spirit or god to guide

him in the right direction. Just as the serpent's questions open up the woman's mind and give her self-discovery "creates a doubleness in the woman's soul" and "She experiences herself not only as a being with desires, but also as a being with thoughts, a being that can inquire into the truth about her desires." Before the ghosts visit and before the serpent's questioning, the two characters held no realization of separation between them and god and they hid from their idealized selves.

Just as Jacob in the story wrestles with God, Scrooge "wrestles" with his ideal self and his potential self. He then relies on the "hardware" ontology to keep dealing with his sin. For example, in the Tower of Babel story, the people relied on hardware alone without software because they feared another flood, loneliness, and the idea of having to think for themselves. The "tower" that Kass describes in the story to reach the top is a physical solution to the internal desire hardware to hide ones ideal self. In *A Christmas Carol*, Scrooge builds up a metaphorical "tower" of wealth to block out joy, happiness, and his inner emotions of his ideal self to shine through.

This topic leads me to the next representation of managing sin and divine dignity when Scrooge displays mythic dissociation in the story. According to Professor Karshner, mythic dissociation means that the idealized self has reached a point where it has been covered and hidden for so long that one's ideal self will no longer manifest itself. The ontological software and hardware of the character are shown in the story as well. Scrooge deals with his shame, which is the consequence of the coincidence of opposites between his potential and actual self while using only hardware ontology.

According to a summarized version of *A Christmas Carol*, "Scrooge weeps over his own grave, begging the spirit for a chance to change his ways, before awakening to find it is Christmas morning. He immediately repents and becomes a model of generosity and kindness: He visits Fred, gives Cratchit a raise, and becomes like "a second father" to Tiny Tim. As the final narration states, "Many laughed to see this alteration in him, but he let them laugh and little heeded them, for he knew that no good thing in this world ever happened, at which some did not have their fill of laughter. His own heart laughed and that was quite enough for him. And it was always said of him that he knew how to keep Christmas well if any man alive possessed the knowledge." Scrooge hits his breaking point and it is at that very moment when we realizes his ideal self and, as according to Navajo perspective, he has discovered divine dignity and develops awareness of how to reach ceremony.

Relating the various examples I have illustrated their idea of existence is simple when you look at the individuals as "heroes" obtaining feelings of both pride and shame. For example, Scrooge and Joseph's brothers are closely related emotionally because they both hold too much pride in themselves, thus causing them to ignore "god" and to feel that there is no need to look to a spiritual being for strength and guidance. When one holds an overabundance of pride, the ideal self is ignored and-they can never reach divine dignity. Feelings of shame often take control of these individuals and their ontology because they never realize the fault in their actions. They never realize that they may be hurting others around them. Scrooge felt pride and authority over others causing him to build up emotional walls and hardware in order to hide from his ideal self.

In *A Christmas Carol*, Scrooge was also living in fear of loneliness and abandonment. The flashbacks of his childhood illustrated how he was often neglected as a child and was not nurtured and loved the way a child should be raised. In Zolbrod's story "Gathering of the Clans," Changing Woman experiences loneliness after she and her sister hid from the monsters in the Banded Rock Mountain until they were destroyed. She tells Talking God, "But for five

nights since the monsters were destroyed I have been all alone in these mountains. At first I did not mind the solitude very much. But on each day it bothered me more. Until I realized how lonely I was.” Changing Woman’s loneliness resembles Scrooges feelings of shame and isolation when he realizes he has ignored kind actions of others and had hid from his ideal self for such a long time. He claimed that he was better off alone on his own without anyone to love, however, he realizes that hiding and pushing people away only leads to pain. She continues to say, “Now I long for mortal company. And my longing hangs on my body like pain.”

In the Navajo story of Changing Woman, she did not ignore the “monsters” in her life until they were “destroyed” because they could not escape her memory and existed forever in her ontology. She reached ceremony when she developed self-awareness realizing she had strength and did not hide “in the mountains” as Changing Woman had waited until the monsters were destroyed.

On the other hand, Scrooge behaved in an opposing manner when he separated himself from others who felt joy and let monsters control his life, thus diminishing divine dignity and keeping him from his ideal self and ceremony. These individuals are opposite when it comes to ontology and reaching ceremonial goals according to Navajo perspective, however, they do share one common trait. Both individuals hold moral intention and eventually make efforts to defeat the monsters in their lives. People of modern society hold many different versions of monsters in their lives, but it is how we portray our actions and ontology that determines whether or not we reach our ultimate goal of ceremony.

I feel there is a place for traditional ontology in the modern world, and it lies in the moments that we feel shame, fear, and neglect. One must first step back and observe oneself to discover the meanings of their actions and how they affect others. It took four ghosts displaying past, present, and future events of Scrooge’s life in order for him to self-reflect and find his ideal self. The same actions must be taken in modern times when behavior is not seen as “monstrous” until we use hardware and software ontology to find meaning in our actions. According to Levinas, “In order for there to be an existent in this anonymous existing, it is necessary that a departure from the self and a return to the self becomes possible.” In order for one to know that they are behaving selfishly and hurting others, they must see it from another point of view to change and correct their mistakes.

I see traditional ontology relates in my life when I am overcoming an obstacle or feeling indecisive when making important decision. My values and morals increase as I grow and become wiser, developing a sense of what truly matters in my life. Family is a very important part of my life and no matter how hectic, busy, or chaotic my life becomes I always will put them first. However, there are times when I lose sight of the importance of those around me and how much my family supports me in my efforts to succeed in education and in my general life goals. Just as the Gambler and Scrooge lost sight of the software needed in traditional ontology, humans too are not perfect and tend to get caught up in their personal needs and goals and forget the software “belief” side of ontology. Without the software (agency) of ontology one will experience liminality which, According to Dr. Karshner, means the act of being in between “states.”

One must step outside of themselves for a brief moment and see the world through another’s eyes and realize that there are others out in the world that may be suffering or fighting a much larger battle. Seeing the world through another perspective gives one the awareness of how their ontology is carried out and they see the “monsters” of their life in a different light. Traditional ontology allows us to determine whether or not we want to be a Scrooge, a Gambler,

or a heroic inspiration to others around us. I feel that each day we have the choice to either appreciate life or to let it pass us by, and I will never run from the “monsters” in my life. I will face them and enjoy life with the people I love and admire the most.

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