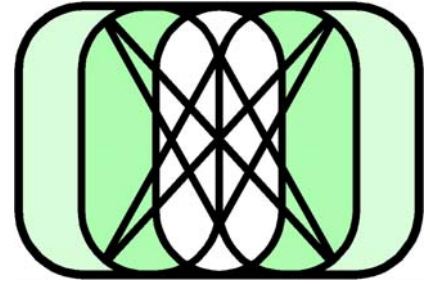


Church of Creation

Order of Service

Sunday, February 15, 2009 8:00 AM



Welcome:

You are always already chosen

Hymn: Blah-Blah

Announcements and sharing

This week in Semiotics: **All Opposed?**

Lost In Space...

Birthday acknowledgment:

Jeremy Bentham (February 15, 1748 – June 6, 1832, aged 84)
English jurist, philosopher, and social reformer

Pam Wignot (February 18) • **Jacqui Ross** (February 20)

Process:

No Things, No Strings...

Message:

Purity vs. Perfection

Dialogue on Purity vs. Perfection

Next week: February 22

Last Chance - Fat Chance

Welcome:

Welcome to the Church of Creation! ‘Welcome’ is one of those everyday words mostly spoken and heard automatically. ‘Welcome’ comes to us from the Old English, *wilcuma*, which means, “Your arrival is in alignment with our choice.” This coming together and welcoming is an act of choosing. By welcoming you, we are communicating that you are always already chosen. You don’t have to do anything to be chosen; you already are. Thank you for Being.

There is also nothing to believe or disbelieve. This is a church without a creed or a code. Recognizing that believing or disbelieving may get in the way of living authentically, one of our practices is to suspend belief in favor of inquiries into the unknowable infinity of Being. Notice that I said suspend: you do not have to give up your beliefs. Your beliefs will still be available to you, if you want to take them up again. It is always your choice.

Inquiring into the unknowable produces distinctions that make a difference in one’s experience of life. We promise that an open inquiry will give you power over the matter in question.

The distinction between what and that is a basic example of a distinction. The what-it-is of something (its whatness) describes the properties of the thing: its weight and measure, its content and dimensions, how it shows up in consciousness. That-it-is, or thatness, is the ontological aspect of a subject: the fullness of its existence. While whatness is considered important, it is mostly a matter of preference or point-of-view. Thatness is crucial and primary. **What** you eat is important to your life and health. **That** you eat is crucial. This distinction shows up everywhere. Given the subject of church music, we could say that **what** you sing is merely important. What matters is **that** you are joyfully expressed. In our ongoing experiment on bringing aliveness to our music, we invite you to...

Announcements and Sharing:

Sharing what showed up this week inside of our conversation on the Buddhist teaching on cycles of rebirth as a metaphor for our present existence...

Church Charter

Semiotics is a general term for the theory of sign systems. It is an inquiry into the way human beings signify their world in language and derive meaning. Through the study of semiotics, we can see how sign systems are used by media, politics and popular culture to manipulate reactions and manufacture consent. It provides us with a valuable look behind the curtain, and insights into how it works and how it doesn't. Beyond what is merely important and interesting about semiotics, we find that language is the medium in which human beings create the Universe. Using language rigorously and precisely supports complete communications and the fulfillment of possibilities.

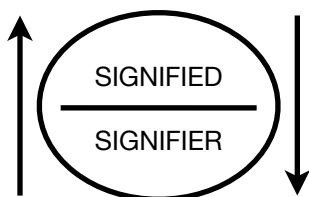
This week in Semiotics: All Opposed?

'Male' and 'female' are not 'opposites', and yet cultural myths routinely encourage us to treat them as such. Masculinity and femininity can be generated through a series of binary oppositions in a literary text. For instance, two consecutive speeches from the beginning of a scene in Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet:

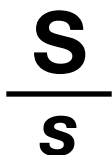
JULIET Wilt thou be gone? it is not yet near day:
It was the nightingale, and not the lark,
That pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear;
Nightly she sings on yon pomegranate-tree:
Believe me, love, it was the nightingale.

ROMEO It was the lark, the herald of the morn,
No nightingale: look, love, what envious streaks
Do lace the severing clouds in yonder east:
Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops.
I must be gone and live, or stay and die.

— Romeo and Juliet, Act III scene V

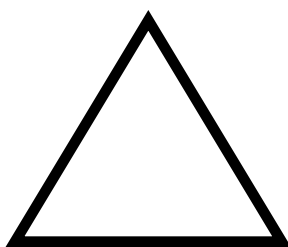


Saussure's Model



Lacan's Model

(2) Object



(1) Sign/
Representamen

(3) Interpretant

Peirce's Model

Romeo	Juliet	The Interplay of Opposites
Male	Female	Human Being
Day	Night	Time
Lark	Nightingale	Bird
Mountain Tops	Pomegranate Tree	Place
Distant (yonder)	Nearby (yon)	Proximity
Go	Stay	Action
Live	Die	Existence
Waking	Sleeping	Consciousness
Burnt	Pierc'd	Evidence
Jocund	Fearful	Emotion
Seeing	Hearing	Sensation

Such oppositions tend to retreat to transparency in reading or watching the play. The gendered character of the echoes and parallels is consequently quite surprising when the text is submitted to this kind of analysis. And yet these oppositions do not seem to be purely analytical constructions. In very subtle ways, the literature of a culture establishes and supports relationships of binary opposition between two aspects of like entities. One side of the binary is privileged over the other. In our culture, male and attributes connected with maleness, are privileged over female and attributes of femaleness. Other binaries include white/black, light/dark, us/them, me/you. Opposition is an artifact of language. How much of our prejudices and misunderstandings of each other are the result of language? And how much is language a reflection of our psychological differentiation between self and other? We cannot know. Here in the middle of it, we can consider our use of the concept of 'opposite' and be responsible for putting supposed opposites back into the interplay of the unknowable.

The ever-present sky is, in a way, an overarching context for all that happens here on Earth. Reason would give us doubts that the stars could move us any more than we could move the stars, although it is possible. Even when astrological projections correlate with what is going on with our lives, it is useful to remember that correlation does not indicate causation, and whenever one considers a possibility to be the “Truth,” it becomes a lie. For us of course, it is just inspiring to look upward and see the Universe showing off. Our purpose here is to expand our awareness and explore all

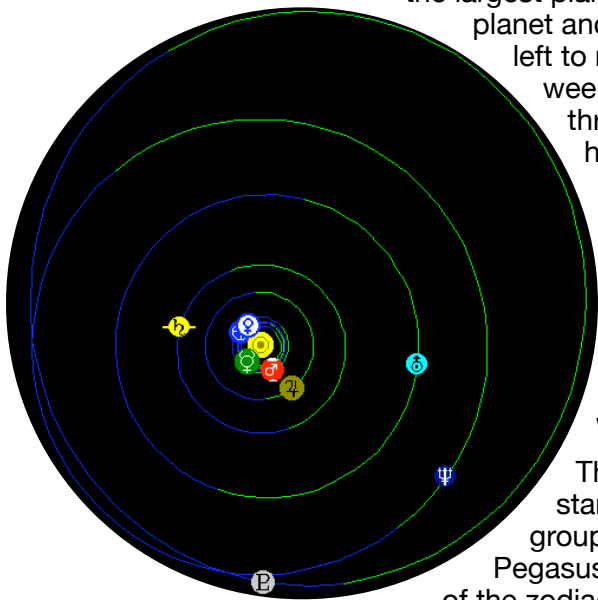
inquiries, and so we look outward from this planet to get...

Lost In Space...



This week, **February 15th through February 21st**, the Universe is giving a treat to early risers. Looking a

Southeast an hour before sunrise, Mars — our closest neighboring planet, Jupiter — the largest planet in our solar system, and Mercury — the smallest planet and the one closest to the sun, all line up in that order, from left to right, getting closer and closer every morning. Later this week, the waning crescent Moon joins the party Friday through Sunday. Remember to take a look about two hours before our service next week, and especially if you have a flat view of the horizon, you'll see three planets and the Moon all at once.



Does this have any astrological significance. Probably. Also, this week the Sun moves from Aquarius to Pisces on the 19th. Pisces, the Sign of the Fishes, is the twelfth and last Sign of the Western Zodiac. It runs from February 19 to March 20, and is associated with the Water Element.

The constellation of “the fishes,” Pisces is a group of faint stars representing two fish linked by a V-shaped chain. The group fits around the southwest corner of the constellation Pegasus. Although Pisces is regarded as the twelfth constellation of the zodiac, the precession of equinoxes has brought the vernal equinox from Aries into Pisces, so that technically it is the first constellation. Although the Sun enters the sign of Pisces on February 19, it doesn't enter the constellation itself until March 11.

In astronomy, precession refers to the movement of the rotational axis of a body, such as a planet, with respect to inertial space. In particular, it refers to the precession of the Earth's rotational axis, also called the **precession of the equinoxes**. Like a wobbling top, the orientation of the Earth's axis is slowly but continuously changing, tracing out a conical shape in a cycle of approximately 26,000 years (called a Great or Platonic year in astrology). This movement is caused by the gravitational forces of the Sun and the Moon, and to a lesser extent other bodies, on the equatorial bulge of the spinning Earth.

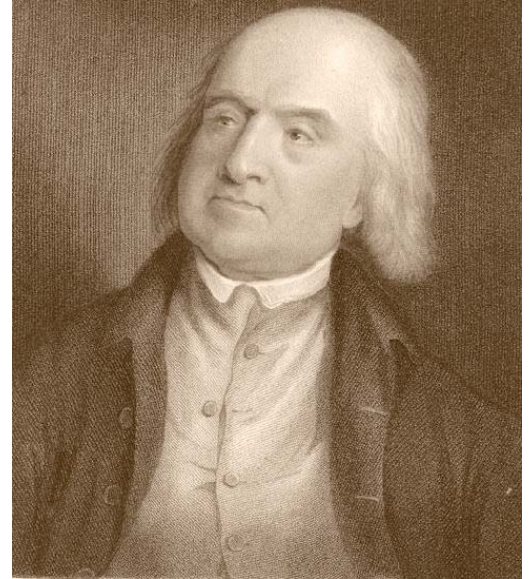
Birthday Acknowledgement: February 15th

Jeremy Bentham (15 February 1748–6 June 1832) was an English jurist, philosopher, and legal and social reformer. He was the brother of Samuel Bentham. He was a political radical, and a leading theorist in Anglo-American philosophy of law. He is best known for his advocacy of utilitarianism, for the concept of animal rights, and his opposition to the idea of natural rights, with his oft-quoted statement that the idea of such rights is “nonsense upon stilts.” He also influenced the development of welfarism. He became known as one of the most influential of the utilitarians, through his own work and that of his students. These included his secretary and collaborator on the utilitarian school of philosophy, James Mill; James Mill’s son John Stuart Mill; and several political leaders including Robert Owen, who later became one of the founders of socialism.

Bentham’s position included arguments in favor of individual and economic freedom, the separation of church and state, freedom of expression, equal rights for women, the end of slavery, the abolition of physical punishment (including that of children), the right to divorce, free trade, and the decriminalization of homosexual acts. He also made two distinct attempts during his life to critique the death penalty.

Among his many proposals for legal and social reform was a design for a prison building he called the *Panopticon*. Although it was never built, the idea had an important influence upon later generations of thinkers.

Twentieth-century French philosopher Michel Foucault argued that the *Panopticon* was paradigmatic of a whole raft of nineteenth-century ‘disciplinary’ institutions.



Quotes

All punishment is mischief; all punishment in itself is evil.

As to the evil which results from a censorship, it is impossible to measure it, for it is impossible to tell where it ends.

Every law is an infraction of liberty.

It is the greatest good to the greatest number of people which is the measure of right and wrong.

It is vain to talk of the interest of the community, without understanding what is the interest of the individual.

Lawyers are the only persons in whom ignorance of the law is not punished.

No power of government ought to be employed in the endeavor to establish any system or article of belief on the subject of religion.

Secrecy, being an instrument of conspiracy, ought never to be the system of a regular government.

Stretching his hand up to reach the stars, too often man forgets the flowers at his feet.

The age we live in is a busy age; in which knowledge is rapidly advancing towards perfection.

The greatest happiness of the greatest number is the foundation of morals and legislation.

The power of the lawyer is in the uncertainty of the law.

The question is not, “Can they reason?” nor, “Can they talk?” but rather, “Can they suffer?”

Tyranny and anarchy are never far apart.

Process: **No Things, No Strings...**

We are about to participate in a process. The process is a way to bring something that has not been experienced or experienced fully — or even something impossible to experience — into ordinary experience. There is nothing that you are supposed to get from it. There is no way that it is supposed to look. You get to experience what you experience and you get whatever you get.

Please position yourself comfortably, and close your eyes, if you would like to. Bring your awareness to your breathing and the words you are hearing. Allow your attention to your own thoughts to fade into the background. Create a rhythmic method for your breathing, inhaling through the nose, pausing after you inhale to allow the air to fully enliven your cells, then exhaling completely and pausing for a moment to consider the precious gift of air before receiving it gratefully, inhaling and smiling with joy.

As you breathe and smile, create for yourself the experience of Being where you are with your eyes closed. When you breathe in, experience yourself expanding your consciousness beyond your body to fill the house or building you are in, to become a whole house of consciousness — a conscious house. When you breathe out, release whatever attachment you may have had to your body inside of the house and identify yourself to yourself as the whole house. With every experience of breathing in, expand your house-consciousness to include the outside, including the trees, sidewalks, perhaps other people or animals, perhaps the houses or buildings next door or nearby. Breathing out, allow yourself to release any attachment you may have had for being just the house you were and identify yourself to yourself as the consciousness of your neighborhood. Continue this practice of breathing in and expanding to include more and more of your world. Breathing out you release your attachment to the things you include, giving yourself the freedom to expand again, when you breathe in again.

As you practice your breathing in and out, feeling very calm and relaxed and warm and whole, expand your consciousness to include the buildings and water-towers and utility poles and trucks and people and animals that make up your town, receiving them gratefully into your conscious being, and then breathe out and give up your attachment to them. Expand yourself to include your state and the natural features and landmarks, from caves to hills to beaches, whole cities, whole rivers. Receive them joyfully into your existence and immediately upon exhaling, begin to give up any attachment to their familiarity or any aspect of them that would hinder you in giving them up. Country. Continent. Planet. Solar System. Universe.

Now that you include all that there is, give up any attachment you may feel toward the Universe or any part of the Universe. You are Everything and attached to Nothing. As you breathe in, allow the stars and galaxies within you to shine brightly, and as you breathe out, allow them to fade out and become dark. If you find yourself preferring either the light or the dark, please give that up also.

Now, without attachment, breathe out and the stars and galaxies take their place and you are just one Solar System. Looking around, create for yourself the realization that everything went back perfectly to its proper place. The next time you exhale, blow out the Solar System of which you are only one planet. Notice that the Sun and other planets are perfect, just as they are. When you breathe out again, breathe out the planet, except for the country that you are, and notice that the planet is as it should be. State. Neighborhood. House.

As you breathe out your house or building, notice that it is the perfect place for you to be right now. Also notice that you are the perfect You right now.

When you are ready to do so, please open your eyes.

Message:

Purity v. Perfection Sunday, February 15, 2009

Lupercalia

Plutarch described Lupercalia:

Lupercalia, of which many write that it was anciently celebrated by shepherds, and has also some connection with the Arcadian Lycaea. At this time many of the noble youths and of the magistrates run up and down through the city naked, for sport and laughter striking those they meet with shaggy thongs. And many women of rank also purposely get in their way, and like [naughty] children at school, present their hands to be struck, believing that the pregnant will thus be helped in delivery, and the barren to pregnancy.

The premise of this practice is that ritual punishment, meted out by naked young men (in their 'pure' state), will produce purification of the city. The promise of purification is that it will lead to health, prosperity and fertility.

Puritanism

The central tenet of Puritanism was God's supreme authority over human affairs, particularly in the church, and especially as expressed in the Bible. This view led them to seek both individual and corporate conformance to the teaching of the Bible. It led them to pursue both moral purity down to the smallest detail as well as ecclesiastical purity to the highest level.

The words of the Bible were the origin of many Puritan cultural ideals, especially regarding the roles of men and women in the community. While both sexes carried the stain of original sin, for a girl, **original sin** suggested more than the common roster of Puritan character flaws. Eve's corruption, in Puritan eyes, extended to all women, and justified marginalizing them within churches' hierarchical structures.

Original sin is, according to a doctrine in Christian theology, humanity's state of sin resulting from the Fall of Man. While the Old Testament and the New, which frequently speak of the sinfulness of humans, do not contain the terms "original sin" or "ancestral sin," the doctrine expressed by these terms is claimed to be based on the teaching of Paul the Apostle in Romans 5:12-21, where he contrasts Adam with Jesus — "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. (Rom 5:19)" Some see the doctrine as implied in Old Testament passages such as Psalm 51:5 ("Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me."). A doctrine of original sin, however, is not found in Jewish theology; original sin is also rejected by the post-Christian Abrahamic religions, Islam and the Bahá'í Faith.

In the history of Christianity this condition has been characterized in many ways ranging from something as insignificant as a slight deficiency, or a tendency toward sin yet without collective guilt, referred to as a "sin nature," to something as drastic as total depravity or automatic guilt by all humans through collective guilt.

Some have suggested that it is a "Puritan spirit" in the United States' political culture that creates a tendency to oppose things such as alcohol and open sexuality. However, the Puritans were not opposed to drinking alcohol in moderation or to enjoying their sexuality within the bounds of marriage as a gift from God. In fact, spouses (in practice, mainly women) were disciplined if they did not perform their sexual marital duties, in accordance with I Corinthians ch. 7 and other biblical passages. Because of these beliefs, the Puritans publicly punished drunkenness and sexual relations outside of marriage. Although various liberation movements, since the 1960s, have altered these views, they still show up whenever mention is made of same-sex marriages or domestic partnerships. The "Religious Right" attempts to enforce Puritan moral standards on believers and non-believers alike, claiming the supreme authority of their god.

Ideal Forms (Idealism) of Plato

Plato (428/427 BC – 348/347 BC) postulated a theory of Forms. For him, there is a form for every object or quality in reality: forms of dogs, human beings, mountains, colors, courage, love, and goodness. Form answers the question “what is that?” Plato was going a step further and asking what Form itself is. He supposed that the object was essentially or “really” the Form and that the phenomena were mere shadows mimicking the Form; that is, momentary portrayals of the Form under different circumstances. The problem of universals — how can one thing in general be many things in particular - was solved by presuming that Form was a distinct singular thing but caused plural representations of itself in particular objects. Matter was considered particular in itself.

These Forms are the essences of various objects: they are that without which a thing would not be the kind of thing it is. For example, there are countless types of dogs in the world but the Form of dogness is at the core; it is the essence of all of them. The essence of something is that by which it is known. Plato held that the world of Forms is separate from our own world (the world of substances) and also is the true basis of reality. Removed from matter, Forms are the most **pure** of all things. Furthermore, Plato believed that true knowledge/intelligence is the ability to grasp the world of Forms with one’s mind.

The pure land

The Forms exist in a rarefied sector of the universe...

But the true earth is pure (*katharan*) and situated in the pure heaven (*en katharōi ouranōi*) ... and it is the heaven which is commonly spoken by us as the ether (*aithera*) ... for if any man could arrive at the extreme limit ... he would acknowledge that this other world was the place of the true heaven (*ho alethōs ouranos*) and the true light (*to alethinon phōs*) and the true earth (*hē hōs alēthōs gē*). (*Phaedo*, ¶1109)

In comparison to it our earth is “spoiled and corroded as in the sea all things are corroded by the brine.” There the colors are “brighter far and clearer than ours; there is a purple of wonderful luster, also the radiance of gold and the white which is in the earth is whiter than any chalk or snow.” Moreover the plants are better: “and in this far region everything that grows - trees and flowers and fruits - are in a like degree fairer than any here.” Gems lie about like ordinary stones: “and there are hills, having stones ... more transparent, and fairer in color than our highly-valued emeralds and sardonyxes” And for the humans, “... they have no disease, and live much longer than we do, and have sight, and hearing and smell ... in far greater perfection. They converse with the gods and see the sun, moon and stars as they truly are” (*Phaedo*, ¶1110) Indeed, for Plato, “god” is identical to the Form of the Good.

Ideals as Dead Possibilities

We are well aware of ideals. They are usually prefaced with ‘should’ or ‘shouldn’t’ or even “somebody ought to do something about....” We speak of these ideals as if they were possible, and yet throughout human history, they have not put in an appearance. No one should be hungry. There should be Peace and Justice for All. Ideals have lost their capacity to inspire and occur as heavy, unbearable burdens. Possibilities, as we have distinguished them though our inquiries, are inherently inspiring. They bring forth new domains of action or essence. Ideals are possibilities that are no longer living as possibilities.

The Impossibility of Purity

Plato postulated a world of ideal Forms, which he admitted were impossible to know. Nevertheless he formulated a very specific description of that world, which did not match his metaphysical principles. Corresponding to the world of Forms is our world, that of the mimes, a corruption of the real one. This world was created by the Good

according to the patterns of the Forms. Man's proper service to the Good is cooperation in the implementation of approximations of the ideal in the world of shadows; that is, in miming the Good. Since purity is measured against a standard, and the standard of ideal Forms is unknowable, purity is impossible.

The Possibility of Perfection

In the Sermon on the Mount, as it has come to be called, Jesus is quoted by the Gospel writer Matthew in 5:48 saying, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." This must have been astonishing to his listeners. He is bringing a very Eastern concept into a Western culture. Western or Abrahamic religions are about establishing a relationship with god, while Eastern or Dharmic traditions are about recognizing one's identity with god. I assert that if perfection were not possible, it would not have been suggested. The reason that the Jewish leaders wanted Jesus killed, and the Romans wanted to exterminate Christianity, has paradoxically been lost on mainstream Christianity. Jesus repeatedly identified himself with god, and over and over again, suggested that we could also identify ourselves with god.

In what way could we be perfect as god is perfect? Perhaps a study of the word that is translated as 'perfect' may shed some light on the question.

τέλειος from τέλος
Teleios tel'-i-os Adjective

brought to its conclusion, finished
lacking nothing necessary to completeness
perfect
that which is perfect
consummate human integrity and virtue

of men:

full grown, adult, of full age, mature

What we are considering is this: attempting to approximate an unknowable standard of purity is not possible. The possibility of Being Perfect is in recognizing and embracing that, just as you are, without having to change anything, who you are is a unique expression of Human Being, which no one else can express as completely as you can. You lack nothing that is necessary to completeness.

Another word translated 'perfect'...

κατατίζω from κατα and ἄρτι
Katartizo kat-ar-tid'-zo Verb

to render, i.e. to fit, sound, complete
to mend (what has been broken or rent), to repair
to complete
to fit out, equip, put in order, arrange, adjust
to fit or frame for one's self, prepare
ethically: to strengthen, perfect, complete, make one what he ought to be

found in:

Lu 6:40 "The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is **perfect** shall be as his master."

κατα-
Kata kat-ah' Preposition
throughout
according to, toward, along

ἄρτι
Arti ar'-tee Adverb
just now, this moment, now at this time,
at this very time, this moment

This is about Being who you are, according to this present moment.

Dialogue on Purity v. Perfection

Completion

Next week: February 22

Next Sunday, the 22nd of February, the last Sunday of this short month, is the Sunday before Fat Tuesday. The following day, the carnival of Mardi Gras gives way to the ashes of Roman Catholic practice. The message and theme of next week's service is Last Chance - Fat Chance, in which we will explore hedonism and consider our relationship to time and circumstance when it occurs that "time is running out," and we want to get something that we haven't got.