

## **The Dining Philosophers by Dr. Daniel Myers ©2016**

### **Dramatis Personae**

- Socrates: a philosopher of ancient Greece, described primarily in accounts by his student Plato and known for his inquiries into the nature of virtue
- René Descartes: a philosopher of the Enlightenment, known for his work in mathematics and his famous phrase "I think, therefore I am."
- Friedrich Nietzsche: a German nihilist philosopher, known for his rejection of religion and the concept of the Übermensch (superior man)
- Jacques Derrida: a French philosopher, known for introducing the technique of deconstruction to textual analysis
- Waiter: a waiter

### **INTRODUCTION**

<CAFE MUSIC PLAYS>

VOICE-OVER: The Dining Philosophers is filmed before a live studio audience.

### **SCENE I**

WAITER: Good evening. Welcome to Chez d'Or d'Argent d'Elysees.

DERRIDA: Ah! A French restaurant! Superbe!

WAITER: Actually, we serve Chinese food.

NIETZSCHE: The superior man digests all cuisines!

WAITER: I regret to inform you that we are about to close. We have some food remaining in the kitchen that I would be happy to serve you, but we have only two pairs of chopsticks remaining in the entire restaurant and there are four of you!

SOCRATES: Be not concerned. As we are philosophers, we will each alternate between discoursing on matters of knowledge and eating. You may place one chopstick between each of us. When ready to eat, each philosopher will first acquire the chopstick to his right, then the chopstick to his left. After eating, he will release both chopsticks back to the table so that other philosophers may take them.

Of course, we cannot guarantee that any one philosopher will be able to acquire both chopsticks before being interrupted by another, but I don't see how that could be a problem.

WAITER: An excellent and rational solution. I am certain that nothing could possibly go wrong with this plan.

<THE PHILOSOPHERS SIT AT THE TABLE AND THE WAITER PLACES ONE CHOPSTICK BETWEEN EACH PAIR OF PHILOSOPHERS>

<THE WAITER BRINGS FOOD>

## **SCENE II**

DESCARTES: I think, therefore I am ... going to try the orange chicken. I will first acquire the chopstick to my right, as we agreed.

SOCRATES: As for me, all I know is that I know nothing ... and that I want an egg roll. I will now take the chopstick to my right.

DERRIDA: As soon as we cease to believe in such an engineer and in a discourse which breaks with the received historical discourse, and as soon as we admit that every finite discourse is bound by a certain bricolage and that the engineer and the scientist are also species of bricoleurs, then the very idea of bricolage is menaced and the difference in which it took on its meaning breaks down ... hey, are those potstickers?

I will pick up the chopstick to my right.

NEITZSCHE: He who fights with monsters should look to it that he himself does not become a monster. And if you gaze long into an abyss, the abyss also gazes into you.

The superior man loves dim sum! Let me pick up the chopstick to my right!

DESCARTES: Is it my turn again? I was going to eat, and I have the chopstick to my right, so I should pick up the chopstick to my left.

Oh, Freidrich! It seems that you are already holding the chopstick. Might I borrow it for a moment?

NEITZSCHE: THE SUPERIOR MAN IS NOT BOUND BY YOUR OUTDATED MORALITY! I WILL NOT GIVE UP THAT WHICH I HAVE TAKEN!

SOCRATES: Nor will I.

DERRIDA: Nor will I.

DESCARTES: Then we are at an impasse. Each of us holds one of the four chopsticks, so none of us can ever acquire the second chopstick. Therefore, no philosopher can ever make progress.

DERRIDA: It's as if we have locked ourselves up in a prison of our own making.

NIETZSCHE: It is a kind of death. A death by locking...

ALL TOGETHER: DEADLOCK!

SOCRATES: Whoa, that is a great name for a band.