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Prescribed Title #1

“Others have seen what is and asked why.

I have seen what could be

and asked

why not”

(Pablo Picasso)

Explore this distinction with reference to two areas of knowledge.

I. Introduction

In the statement above, Picasso assumes man’s reaction to the world is defined by two questions: why, or why not? With this assumption, he creates a divide between “others” and himself. But what exactly is this divide?

“Others,” a generalization of the society at large, analyse the present. They use robust, grounded ways of knowing such as reasoning and logic to understand individual circumstances, and often ask, as a result, why?

Picasso, however, saw past the circumstances of the present. Instead, he looked into the possibilities of the future, bringing to use imagination and faith through his art, to see what “could,” or had the potential to, be.

The statement itself raises a number of questions. For example, should we strive to see like Picasso, or continue as the “others”? Well, for one, how do we weigh between them, between reason and imagination? And does imagination ever create true knowledge?

In a world full of realistic thinkers, the importance of Picasso’s perspective is seen through answering the knowledge questions above with the indigenous and religious knowledge systems, then using the knowledge claims produced to assess real life situations, both personal and global, that apply therein.

II. Indigenous Knowledge Systems

First, man's tendency to conform to the "others" can be explained, from an empirical perspective, through the indigenous knowledge systems. The primary warrant for this comes from the study of animal behavior. Concluded by many philosophers, it seems as if man is the only species to improve beyond sufficiency. As we see in nature, when animals meet their dietary and survival needs, they do not strive for more. When beavers build a wooden dam that works, they do not continue adding advanced gadgets to their structure. The "others" here use the same reasoning as a way of knowing, understanding that if something is sufficient as it is, to leave it be, for it is not worth the energy needed to further improve it. To recall a simple idiom: "If it ain't broke, why fix it?"

Answer: because unlike other animals, it is not in man's nature to be content with sufficiency. If it had been, we would still live like cavemen, gathered around fires and hunting for food. Because unlike other animals, man has been gifted a profound intelligence. One that deviates from the natural complacency of other animals. We, as humans, must use that intelligence to see past what is sufficient. We mustn't halt ourselves with pointless impediments such as asking every "why." Instead, we may, like Picasso, ask: why *not*? To *imagine* what "could be," given the beaver improves her dam. To act not in need, but in hope---of a future.

Implications, however, arise with the justification: how does one decide between utilising the reasoning of the "others" or the imagination of Picasso? In short, they are two viable ways of resolving a situation. No person should seek to avoid every case by asking "why," nor should they chase every opportunity in asking "why not." However, one must keep in mind the end result so as to not save energy and develop sloth in every situation. If the end result is trivial, and the effort unnecessary, then "why" is a proper approach. But as warned by Picasso, this approach should not be overused. If the end result proves to be significant, and the effort necessary, then the individual must use imagination as a way of knowing to see past sufficiency, to ask "why not," when confronted with life's challenges. When this way of thought is applied to the plights of humanity, true progress can be made. Not only for that which is required by man, but also that which is desired.

III. Religious Knowledge Systems

Next, Picasso's statement can also be examined from an ontological perspective through the religious knowledge systems. Although the religious knowledge systems have been heavily debated between philosophers and theologians, this section focuses on my personal transition from the perspective of the "others" *why* to Picasso's *why not*.

Growing up without much religious influence, my navigation of religion was untidy and self-taught. Until high school, I hadn't given much thought to religion, purely because it wasn't a major part of my life. But as I became a product of my environment, I began to dislike the concept of religion, questioning the nature of this world. I saw things no child deserved to see---a brother attempting to kill his own brother, two sisters fighting depression and suicidal thoughts, a lonely mother losing her mind, a missing father returning on the brink of death. These were just my internal problems. Outside of my family, I witnessed children in Pakistan starving on the streets, while Americans continued to throw away their leftovers. I heard of teenagers in my neighborhood shot dead, and made friends with others who dropped out of high school because they already had kids. And to think at that point, I hadn't even learned about the millions of helpless people around the world, being exterminated in Chinese concentration camps, or murdered cold in Palestinian streets, or bombed and starved simultaneously in Yemen, Syria, or Sudan. I had just one question in my mind: *why*? If there was a God, why would He do this? What kind of cruel, sick being would create a world as dark and twisted as this reality?

Searching for an answer, I turned to religion. More specifically, the only one I had been exposed to: Islam. I started by reading the Qur'an and learning to pray independently. After memorizing Arabic verses and praying postures, I began praying Eastward five times a day. Over time, through a process too intricate to detail in this essay, Allah (SWT) came to me, in bits and pieces. My faith had become grounded in His presence, and when I had questions, He had answers. But I never confronted Him with the ultimatum, *why*? Rather, I realized the true nature of the world: *why not*? With faith as a way of knowing, I saw what "could be" of life, i.e. jannah (the heavenly afterlife), and understood, the suffering of those aforementioned would be paid for in full. The ones who died as babies, would surely soon be on their way to a better world. The

ones laden with the biggest burdens, were never meant to respond perfectly, for once they passed, they would also have theirs. Through faith, and realization of the afterlife, I answered to the world: why *not* test the virtues of man, for what better way is there to distinguish the good souls from the evil?

Then an issue arose from the knowledge question. With such heavy reliance on imagination and faith as ways of knowing, I asked myself if the two ever created *true* knowledge. At first thought, you would think that true knowledge is impossible here, because phenomena such as religion are physically unprovable. But to the individual, who through faith takes the belief as undeniable truth, certainly true knowledge has been generated. The pious knows of the afterlife as the unimpaired observer knows of nature's colors. Without doubt, it is certain, for each has seen.

IV. Real Life Situations

Thus, it is given as two conclusions: one must weigh between reason and imagination with end result in mind, avoiding overuse of the former, understanding truthfulness in the latter, to ask themselves: why, or why not?

Scenario one: I am at a barber. I have cut my hair like usual, short on the sides, medium on the top. While finishing the haircut, the barber asks if there is anything else I would like. For weeks, I had wanted to dye my black hair blonde. Using imagination as a way of knowing, I saw the end result as something I desired. Instead of being content with my hair, fine as it was, I took the risk, and asked myself, *why not*? The end result happened to be happiness, and much more than expected.

Scenario two: the US has securitization over the means of violence. Through this, corrupt officials have chosen to back political agendas over humanitarian rights. Many suffer in nations across the world, but none stand to challenge it, for it is the fixed structure of the world. At this point, many have already chosen to ask "why." What is the point of dreaming so big, to change the world where it is impossible to change? With imagination as a truthful way of knowing to see what "could be," in an improved world, that is internationally cooperative, humane, and just before all, I have not given up. I have dedicated every second of my education, and said, "why

not.” If the end result is a change this massive, why not at least *try* to light up the darkness. Whether it is possible or not, is up to us.

V. Conclusion

In Picasso’s statement, he creates a divide between “others” and himself, a divide that consists of “why” on one side and “why not” on the other. In short, while asking “why” is an occasional necessity, the value of asking “why not” is seen through the indigenous and religious knowledge systems, using empirical and ontological examples, respectively. After producing knowledge claims from questions found in each section, Picasso’s perspective on life can be used to emphasize the importance of asking “why not” in real life situations, personal and global, that have significant impact, both on the individual, and on the world.

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