



Epilogue: On the Wisdom of Aesop*

~ Gregg Zegarelli

In a pack of wolves, the wise wolf teaches that lambs tend to hope that wolves are friendly. Wolves use that fact to catch the dinner.

In a pack of lambs, the wise lamb teaches that wolves tend to be unfriendly. Lambs use that fact to survive from becoming the dinner.

The effect of wisdom is inherently neither good nor evil. What is good or evil is in the judgment of the beholder.

Wolves just want to eat. Lambs just want to survive.

Many books teach how to be a *good* person. Aesop teaches how to be a *wise* person. There is a difference.

The fables of Aesop have been handed down over thousands of years, undoubtedly augmented, yet consistent in essence. Let us recognize why these fables have withstood the test of time, since c.600 BCE. More than 2,500 years.

* *The Essential Aesop: For Business, Managers, Writers and Professional Speakers*. Epilogue reprinted with permission. Copyright © 2013 OUG Press, Ltd. All rights reserved. www.AesopBook.com

First. Aesop's fables are for use by everyone; that is, Aesop is certainly not only for children.

Wisdom is wisdom. It always works, and it works for everyone, children and adults alike. If the seed of wisdom is planted into a child, all the better for the extra time, but wisdom will grow in anyone who accepts and nurtures it.

Second. Let us be wise and recognize Aesop's masterfully subtle method of teaching, for Aesop is as clever as a fox.

Simply put, Aesop has us put down our guard of self-defensiveness by so often using his animals; but, yet, he is teaching us about our humanity, and ourselves. A lamb is weak, a fox is clever, a wolf is evil, and a lion is strong.

Why teach this way?

Wisdom, of course, is a practical art, and there is no practical wisdom without an understanding of human nature: that is, the recognition of how human beings tend to act. It is sometimes presumed that the elderly are wise, which is because they have observed the human condition longest: time has provided clarity on what tends naturally to occur, and why.

But Aesop side-steps the very debate that is the subject of the lesson. Aesop wants us to be wise, but he also wants to avoid debating the most essential element of the conversation.

What is the core nature of man? Is man an angel or a brute in the state of nature? The logic of wisdom requires some premises.

Aesop knows that humans tend to hope—particularly in judging themselves—that they are angels, and not ravenous wolves, or a brood of vipers. But wisdom's purpose rests in being forewarned and forearmed with the understanding how human beings are, can be, or tend to be, brutes, wolves, or vipers. So, Aesop tricks us to teach us.

Aesop is both a sage and a master psychologist, which are, of course, necessarily entwined. Aesop removes our natural human tendency to be self-defensive by making the lesson impersonal, such as by using animals and mythological characters.

Aesop teaches us without insulting us. He never says that we might be as mean as wolves or as naïve as lambs. He just tells us his story.

And that is the simple, subtle, majestic, timeless, genius of Aesop.

We simply accept that a lamb is weak, a fox is clever, and a lion is strong. Wolves are always hungry, and they want to eat. “That wolf will eat that little lamb, if she listens to his tricky words! Please little lamb, don’t do it!”

So it is for wolves and lambs, and so it is for us.

~ ~ ~

Wisdom is about observance, prediction, and action or restraint, as the case may require.

Wisdom is not tortured by desires, emotions or passions. The machinery of wisdom runs on clarity of reason.

Lady bird [54] deeply desires to hear how well she sings, so her reasoning is clouded. And, the clever fox knows it, so he gets his lever. He flatters the lady bird out of her supper, as it drops from her mouth as she sings. Silly, naïve, lady bird.

Nor is wisdom tortured by regrets. Wisdom is rational, and so its results are reviewable.

It is certainly possible, of course, that the fox could have picked up and returned the food when it dropped from the lady bird’s mouth. And, if so, she would have her compliment, her song and her food. Or, of course, she might have merely chosen not to sing to assure her food, but then missing singing her song for the fox. So be it. The machinery of wisdom merely calculates the risk:

Is it worth singing to risk losing my food?

Wisdom can answer that question either way. Wisdom is in contemplating causes and the risks of effects, which is a function of recognizing and understanding natural tendencies.

If lady bird answers that the song is worth the risk, and if she loses her food, she made a rational decision, and she thought ahead about it wisely. Now, you may say that lady bird, even having thought about the risk, remains a fool, or maybe even more so, because she nevertheless lost her food.

But, a fool does not observe, understand or think ahead. If lady bird thought ahead and took a risk *for her reason*, and the improbable actually occurred, it has no impact on her wisdom, since wisdom can only be tested using foresight. Fools are forever surprised by the results, and often sorry for the results, but not so for the sage.

Calculated decisions will get to a desired result, or they will not, for many reasons. Many of the reasons for failure of a desired result are accidents. The argument that every act is unwise unless the perfect desired consequence is achieved would cause wisdom to rest on accidents, which it cannot do, by definition. Someone cannot be made wise or a fool in hindsight. A foolish decision that turns out well does not make the decision wise. It simply remains a foolish decision that turned out well. Aesop says as much for the crane who pulled the bone from the throat of the wolf [13]. Getting lucky is not the same as being wise.

Similarly, on this point, it should be mentioned that wisdom is not intelligence, for we know that there cannot be wise fools, but the world is filled with intelligent fools. Wisdom and intelligence do intersect, but their respective essences remain distinct.

In Aesop's Fables, with such clever wisdom and wit, once again, we must remember the core purpose is to forewarn and to forearm: As it may be for lady bird who has never met a clever fox or a hungry wolf, we teach young children, who may only know parental love, to be wise, and to think ahead to distinguish the risks of contact with different adults. A wise parent teaches the lessons of Aesop, to forewarn and to forearm.

Wisdom knows the difference between the failure of academics in learning to swim, and the failure of experience in becoming a wolf's dinner.

Now, apart from unintended consequences, some acts may seem to create unintended consequences. But, again, the judgment for the result, as good

or bad, is in the eye of the beholder, as it may be that anyone else cannot judge, for lack of intelligence or wisdom, the consequence of the act.

Recall the story of the kid who calls down to insult the wolf, but while the kid is safely on the roof [59]. The wolf chides that it is easy to be impudent while out of reach.

If the kid should jump down off of the roof and then insult the wolf, and, if the wolf eats the kid in being so proximate, is the act of jumping down foolish or wise? We might naturally tend to think the act is foolish, but the wisdom of the act really depends.

Indeed, if the kid thinks that the chiding wolf is meek, or if the kid is fueled by passion or emotion, then the act may be foolish. But, yet, wise men have done or been accused for such impudent acts: Socrates, Jesus and Gandhi, and so many other wise persons, many martyrs, all made conscious decisions to accept the risk of consequence for standing within the proximity of the perceived insult. Each in his own way, Socrates insulted the Greeks, Jesus insulted the Jews, and Gandhi insulted the English. All condemned by their greater respective societies, yet all wise men. Socrates, Jesus and Gandhi were unsurprised by the consequences.

The wisdom of a decision is in the calculation of the risk and result, fueled by understanding and clarity of reasoning, rather than desire, passion or emotion. That is why wise decisions are reviewable: we can go back and re-assess the basis for our thought-process for a rational decision, even if it is later determined to have been incorrect. But, the emotional acts of today do not withstand the rational scrutiny of tomorrow, since emotional acts are not fastened by reason.

All wise decisions are necessarily rational, but not all rational decisions are necessarily wise.

For Aesop, the study of wisdom is a science of natural human tendencies. For this science, there is no desire, no hope and no regret. Just natural rules of tendencies. For wisdom, this clarity of reasoning is a good thing.

Wisdom understands, for example, that desire, hope and love exist, and, when constrained to their proper respective contexts, are good. But, such as

for the lion in love [85], those qualities are not part of the essence of wisdom.

Aesop says as much when teaching of the wise lamb who would not give water to the trapped wolf [36], or when the woodsman saved the viper by foolishly taking it into his home only to have it threaten his children [60], or when the hopeful and trusting frog gave a ride to the scorpion [50].

“I am sorry, Mr. Frog, I know you trusted me, but I had to sting you anyway and now we both will die in the river. I am a Scorpion, I sting frogs. That is just what Scorpions do.”

So, at Aesop’s very essence: Wisdom is ever-vigilant, with rational clarity, to what is and what tends to be.

What is and what tends to be.

The wolf is just being a wolf, and woe to the lamb who does not understand that a wolf tends to be a wolf. So much worse: woe to the lamb who *hopes* that a wolf will not be a wolf. And, for the wolf? He counts on the lamb just being a lamb. And, moreover, the wolf counts on the lamb *hoping* the wolf will not be a wolf!

“Yes,” says the young woman, “I will pose for a picture for my boyfriend in this intimate and expressive position, because he admires my beauty, and we will always be in love, and will get married someday, grow old together, and the digital picture will never be found, disseminated or disclosed, and he will remain true to me, forever. And, well, he is different from other men.” Maybe. And, of course, the fox might give back the food to lady bird [54].

The wolf has power, so the lamb must be wise. And, woe to the lamb that gives the wolf even more power or that hopes that wolves will not tend to be like wolves.

Aesop provides a collection of stories about points of human nature and tendencies. And, yes, points of human nature and tendencies more naturally observed and accepted when reduced to the natural tendencies of animals.

A king who has read Aesop may not think himself a lady bird when he reads the fable. Or, maybe the king thinks the story is only for children. But, yet, beware to the flatter of the king who has read Aesop, for that king is forewarned and forearmed. And, later, at the appointed time, the king will have his shield of wisdom, forewarned to his natural tendency to be manipulated by flattery, such as lady bird [54], or by insults, such as the lion [22].

That king will save his kingdom.

Abraham Lincoln, with his group of intelligent advisors, was wise. There is a reason.

As an adult, Lincoln called Aesop's Fables one of his favorite books. And, for what is Lincoln known?

His wisdom, often manifested through short clever stories. He saved his country through his understanding of human tendencies. Lincoln thought ahead. Aesop played no small part in the character of Lincoln's greatness, from pauper to president.

Wisdom is a practical art, and it is often acquired from the bitter pill of experience.

Aesop gives the pill of wisdom in advance and coats it in fables to make it go down easy, for everyone: for children and adults, paupers and kings.

Aesop, thought to be of the lowest rank as a Greek slave, taught kings, and presidents. Log cabins and straw mangers have nothing on wisdom.

Wisdom invites all.

Every person, whether slave, pauper or king, has an equal natural right to be wise. Wisdom is majesty.

Aesop's yoke is easy, and his burden light. And so the wisdom of Aesop endures.

~ Gregg Zegarelli, J.D.

The Essential Aesop

For Business, Managers, Writers and
Professional Speakers



Arnold L. Zegarelli
Gregg R. Zegarelli

OUG Press, Ltd.

About the Authors



Arnold Zegarelli is an author and teacher, with a career spanning more than 50 years. He is author of *Diamond Capsules for Success and Wisdom*. [ISBN: 978-0966368802]



Gregg Zegarelli is a graduate of Duquesne University and the Duquesne University Law School. He is author of *ONE, the Unified Gospel of Jesus*. [ISBN: 978-0978990602]

Arnold and Gregg Zegarelli are father and son.

© 2013 OUG Press, Ltd. All rights reserved.

OUG Press, Ltd., PO Box 113345, Pittsburgh, PA 15241

Published 2013. Printed in USA. www.AesopBook.com

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without written permission from the publisher, except for bona fide review.

ISBN 978-0-9899299-1-2 (Paper), 978-0-9899299-3-6 (eBook)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2013921774

USA 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 – 5 4 3 2

Zegarelli, Arnold. Zegarelli, Gregg

The Essential Aesop:

For Business, Managers, Writers and Professional Speakers

1. Business-Success. 2. Public Speaking. 3. Aesop.

I. Title. 2013

Z.658.452 Includes Index

13. THE WOLF AND THE CRANE

A Wolf had a bone stuck in his throat. He was sure that the Crane, with her long neck, would easily be able to reach the bone and pull it out. "If you pull the bone out for me, I will give you the greatest of rewards," said the Wolf. The Crane, tempted by such a reward, did what the Wolf asked. After, when the Wolf walked away, the Crane said, "But what of my reward?" "How ungrateful!" snarled the Wolf, "Your head was in my mouth, and I gave your life!"

There is no good bargain where there is neither trust in the party nor the ability to enforce the terms.

22. THE LION AND THE ASS

One day, the Lion walked through the forest, and the animals respectfully made way for him. But an envious Ass brayed a scornful remark as he passed. The Lion felt a moment of anger. But when he saw who it was that had spoken, he walked quietly on. He would not honor the Ass with even so much as a response.

*Consider the source.
Do not waste energy on the immaterial.*

36. THE WOLF AND THE SHEEP

A Wolf was injured from a fight with a Bear concerning a meal. Unable to move, he called to a Sheep who was passing nearby, "I am hurt. Kind Lamb, I sweetly beg you to fetch me a drink of water for my strength, so I may get a simple meal." "A meal?" said the Sheep. "That means me, I suppose. And, the water to serve to wash me down your throat. No thank you."

Logical conclusions from natural conditions.

50. THE SCORPION AND THE FROG

A Scorpion needed to cross a pond. Seeing a Frog, the Scorpion asked for a ride to the other side. "You will sting me," said the Frog. "Certainly not," retorted the Scorpion, "for we would both drown in the process!" This made sense to the Frog, so the Scorpion jumped onto the Frog's back. Halfway across, the Scorpion stung the Frog. "Why did you do it," said the Frog, "Now we both die!" "Well," said the Scorpion, "I am a Scorpion and I sting Frogs!"

*Beware the nature of a thing,
which will define its behavior.*

54. THE FOX AND THE CROW

A Fox saw a Crow settle onto a branch with a large piece of cheese in its mouth. “Good day, Mistress Crow,” the Fox cried. “How beautiful your feathers and eyes! I am sure your voice surpasses other birds. Pray sing me a song that I may greet you as the Queen of Birds!” The Crow, quite full of herself for the words, lifted her head and began to sing. But, as she did so, it was only to let the cheese fall to the ground for the Fox to enjoy for his lunch.

Do not trust flatterers.

59. THE WOLF AND THE KID

A Kid was perched up on the top of a house, and, looking down, spied a Wolf passing below. The Kid yelled at the Wolf, "You are a murderer and thief!" "You may curse away, my young friend, by the protection of that roof," retorted the Wolf, "but you would not say so if you were down here next to me."

It is easy to be brave from a safe distance.

60. THE WOODSMAN AND SERPENT

One winter day a Woodsman was tramping home when he saw a Serpent that was almost dead. So, he carried the Serpent into his home and set it on the hearth in front of the fire. His Children watched the Serpent slowly come to life again. Then, one of them stooped down to stroke it, but the Serpent raised its head and venomous fangs to strike. Luckily, the Woodsman seeing this, seized his axe and, with one stroke, cut the Serpent in two.

There is no gratitude from the wicked.

85. THE LION IN LOVE

A Lion fell in love with a beautiful Maiden and proposed marriage to her Parents. The Parents neither wanted the Lion to marry their daughter, nor wanted to offend the Lion. The Father said: "We are honored, but we fear you might do our daughter some injury. If you should have your claws and teeth removed, then we would consider your proposal." The Lion was so in love that he did so. But when he came again to the Parents, they laughed in his face, and bade him do his worst.

Love is the start of folly.

ORDERING INFORMATION

For the latest ordering and author contact information, please visit our website below, which is maintained and dedicated to supporting this book:

www.AesopBook.com

OUG Press, Ltd.
PO Box 113345
Pittsburgh, PA 15241 USA

Wisdom. Pass it around.®