



Teaching Modern Political Philosophy

with Joshua Gibbs

Lesson 10 & 11: Jane
Eyre by Charlotte
Brontë, Pt. 1 & Pt. 2

Outline:

Jane Eyre

- With Shakespeare, characters ceased to unfold and began to develop in the course of a work of fiction. Harold Bloom
 - An unfolding character is the same in the beginning and the end.
 - A character developing is more like a sparrow being sketched on a paper before you.
 - We have to read older characters in a different way than modern characters.
 - Life was fairly constant. People did not undergo profound transformations of character. There was not a steady influx of new influences on people. In the modern era there are new influences.
- In the modern age a man has real genuine choice about what he believes. Jane Eyre is born out of this modern reality where you get to pick yourself.
- The great modern project of creating a secular public square which will be free of all of the factions that religion creates has replaced religious factionalism with political factionalism.

Jane Eyre, Chapter 27

- The chapter is set on the night which follows the morning when Jane and Rochester were to be married.
- Rochester tries to convince Jane to live as his mistress. Jane has been brought up to despise this vice.
- This is the beginning of a moral crisis which Rochester comes to.
- Did Rochester marry her? Yes
- Should he have married her? No
- Do we see any of these characteristics (violent and unreasonable temper, exacting) in Rochester? Yes
- Rochester has made an oath. Progressives don't like oaths, Romantics especially don't like oaths.
 - Why do modern men not respect oaths? An oath will keep you from doing what you want in the moment.
 - An oath is made in the present against the future, but the future reality of an oath binds the future self to the past.



- Oaths are outside of time. An oath transports you out of time.
- He does not understand much about who Berta is. He follows his appetite about Berta. He says his acquisition of her was too easy.
- The way that Rochester presents the way out of his problem is presented in a thoroughly progressive manner.
 - “I have a right to deliver myself from the misery of this life if I can.” He vindicates his thought of suicide as a right.
 - Rights appear to vindicate the desires of our souls for the progressive. Desires are a license in and of themselves. The fluctuations of the self are a kind of divine command.
 - The right to leave his wife materializes from nothing. He discovers it suddenly within himself. It is not an inherited right.
 - Try to clue students in to how disorienting it is when someone denies the natural reality that is present for both of you.
 - One of you should get out your phone and make a call in the middle of class. When your teacher is shocked, deny to them that you have your phone out and see what happens. Note what difficulty your teacher has in responding.
 - To deny the plain reality in front of you is very difficult to respond to. You can't make an argument against this.
 - Hope tells him, “That woman is not your wife, nor are you her husband.” There is no evidence to support this claim. This abstract metaphysical principle suddenly emerges.
 - These rights emerge as they are desired. This is what makes the metaphysical approach to rights so attractive.
 - Rochester speaks as though he is not making this up on his own.
- Rochester says he lives a life of dissipation rather than debauchery for the ten years that he roams.
- The tendency of rights which spontaneously emerge is to reemerging. After you sin once it becomes easier to sin again. Vice is more catchy than virtue.
- Jane is tempted to stay at Thornfield. She has no great alternative. She knows that Rochester invents rights as needed. He is not an oath making (oath keeping) man.
- Because his self is not tied to anything transcendent the sudden abandoning of old oaths is not a rejection of himself it is a being true to himself.
- A traditionalist approach is that remaining faithful to an oath is being true to yourself inasmuch as you were being true to God when you made the oath.
 - Rochester can't make that kind of oath.
- Jane will have to suffer physically to be well spiritually.
- Rochester is trying to convince Jane to stay. This time is different. His argument is typical of modernity.
 - Modernity replaces reason for nature but because for Rousseau government is primarily about consent and man's orientation is toward the future.



- The thing that comes to dominate nature and reason is simply desire. Desire is proof of desire's license. To want a thing is to be entitled to a thing.
- Different philosophers come up with different conceptions of what it means to be human. For the progressive the human being is the wanting creature. To deny a man what he wants is to deny his humanity.
- This is a case where a human being wants another human being. Rochester expresses outrage that he cannot have what he wants. He will be so angry that he will destroy himself.
 - Rochester has no argument/reason here.
 - Consider how often this is the nature of modern political discussion. Please give me what I want, if I don't get what I want I will throw a fit.
- Jane could get away with this sin. There will be no one to judge her. Jane's response: We were born to not get what we want. Jane will suffer worse than Rochester will suffer.
- Rochester is appealing back to the sense of human society as a system closed off from the divine. Their relationship is much like a game of monopoly. How can this possibly be wrong? Let's manipulate the rules to make the game more fun.
- Jane give response which is as close in fiction to a conservative credo.
 - The will will always come into conflict with what it knows is best and what it wants because of pleasure.
 - Laws and principles are things that we come to subscribe to in the past. The will is always present. We enter into a life that is shaped by certain principles. We become subject to laws through choices that we make.
 - Jane has chosen to be a Christian. She subscribes to those commands in a period of calm reflection (sound state of mind). This necessarily implies some suffering in this life.
 - Jane has chosen to identify herself with the law of God which means that she cannot do whatever she wants to do if she is to retain that identity. "You cannot have what I want and neither can I."

Characters in a Novel

- Characters in fiction are almost overly realistic; man personalities poured into singular figures.
- Characters represent fundamental truths about being human that are hard to observe in a single person. They are almost proverbial in their nature. A character is a statement about the way the world works.
- In Jane Eyre, Jane and Rochester are two remarkable avatars of rival positions on what human goodness and human satisfaction looks like.



- Rochester has accepted the ideas about nature, time, and the self of his day. Jane has embraced something older and far stranger and which requires the carrying of a cross.