

## Two Stories

### The Girl and the Two Philosophers

Two philosophers, a man and a woman, were at a party drinking. Nearby, the host's daughter who was eleven was listening in. She was trying to follow what they were saying. The man was talking about an ethics course he was teaching.

The girl became too curious and interrupted the man to ask what 'ethics' was. He didn't feel in the mood to teach. Nevertheless, he said, "We're philosophers and ethics is the study of questions regarding good and evil.

"I should think that that would be obvious." she replied. The man emitted a harsh laugh and, not liking something innocent and pure about the child, he decided that he would initiate her into the real world. "You know that God is good, right?"

"Yes," she replied.

"And God is all-powerful, right?"

"Yes." She nodded.

The woman saw where he was going, and tried to intercede. "No, Carl, this isn't the place for this."

He gave her a wicked smirk, and under his breath said, "It's the alcohol." Then he turned back to the girl. "And evil things happen in the world, right? I mean, innocent children like yourself sometimes suffer horribly."

"Yes. I have even seen it on TV."

"Then, why would a good God who is all-powerful let innocent children suffer? I mean, if He cared, He would stop it, wouldn't He?" He sipped his drink while he watched her think.

She furrowed her eyebrows, "You mean, this is what you do? You philosophers talk about problems like suffering children in a world created by a good God?"

He nodded and stirred his drink.

"And there are others like you philo-philoso—" she struggled over the word.

"He helped her. "Philosophers. Yes, there are tens of thousands of us."

The girl looked him in the eyes and said, “I should think that the existence of real suffering that you can help remove would keep you from wasting time on pointless questions about possible evil. I mean, after school I help my mom at the shelter for homeless women who have babies. If you and this woman help us, and if thousands of your kind along with the students you are teaching helped out, then maybe there wouldn’t be enough evil to be worth talking about.” She finished speaking but still held his gaze.

Meanwhile the female philosopher’s eyes opened wide and she began laughing loudly. “Carl, do you realize what she’s saying! She just solved the age-old philosophical problem of evil by mooting the question through *action*.

The man shook his head. “No, that doesn’t answer the question.”

The woman answered “But it removes and invalidates *asking* the question as long as there is some constructive action we can perform—which is effectively always the case. Ha!” She leaned forward and whispered in his ear, “Carl, you tried to score a point off this little girl and she ended up kicking your ass! I can’t wait to present this at our upcoming Ethics Conference in Atlanta!”

## **Your Time to Act Is Always Now**

*Where there is no love, put love, and you will find love .— St. John of the Cross*

Once upon all time there was an American boy named Steve who, at ten, had just earned his first five dollars by helping his father clean out the attic one Saturday.

About three thousand miles away there lived a Brazilian boy named Santiago. By coincidence, Santiago had been born on the very same day as Steve. His family was very poor, and so he helped his father in the coffee fields all day.

The day after Steve earned his money, he and his family were at church. That day a second collection was taken up to buy seedlings for the poor of South America. When Steve heard that five dollars could buy twenty-five banana or mango trees, he thought hard for a minute, then reached into his pocket for his carefully folded five-dollar bill. As he waited to put the bill in the collection basket, he pictured how the twenty-five trees

could support a whole South American family. But when the basket came around, his father motioned for him not to put the money in the basket.

After church, his father explained that with industry Steve could turn that five dollars into many more dollars over the summer. Then he'd be able to give even more to help the poor. That night he dreamed he was running through row upon row of a wonderfully huge banana and mango plantation that stood in the middle of a dense tropical rain forest. He woke up happy, believing he could really make this happen.

Three weeks later an announcement was made at Santiago's village that good fruit trees were to be given out to the children the next day. Santiago got up very early and waited in line with the other children. But when Santiago got to the front of the line, he learned the trees had just run out. In fact, if one more person would have made a donation, he would have gotten a bundle of twenty-five little trees. "We're very sorry, Santi," he was told.

Meanwhile, Steve had used the five dollars to set up a lemonade stand. By the end of the summer he had made forty-two dollars. He wanted to make a donation for trees for South America right away, but was told he'd have to wait until next July when the collection was taken up again.

By the following summer he had only \$17.52 left. The rest of the money had gone for Christmas presents and repairs to his bike. The week before the collection for South America, his father talked him into spending the money for window-washing equipment and fliers, so that over the summer he might earn a hundred or more dollars—enough to buy trees for an entire village!

You can imagine the next fifty years, but I shall tell you anyway. Steve became a young entrepreneur and made more and more money each summer. But whenever there was a chance to give to the poor, there was at the same time an even better reason not to give. At first, it was education to get a better job; then it was necessary to put away something to get married; then something for his children, and something else in case of emergencies.

All this time, Santiago lived a life on the margin. He saw the other children's orchards grow. Eventually, he went to work for one of them. Then to support his family he had to move to the city. There they were so poor that he lost two of his children to

diphtheria. By sixty, he was a tired old man before his time.

Meanwhile, Steve had become a successful businessman, making \$85,000 a year. Unfortunately, by the time he was sixty-one he was dying of stomach cancer. After he had arranged for his family to be taken care of, he set aside \$100,000 in a trust fund, the interest to be given to promote self-sufficiency to the poor of South America. One of his last thoughts as he lay dying was a happy one: He had not forgotten the poor.

Meanwhile, beaten down by a life of toil, Santiago was also dying. On his deathbed he had the same dream that Steve had had fifty-one years earlier, of a beautiful lush tropical fruit plantation that would take care of his family, which in his dream was the size of a village. The next day he was buried by his one son and two daughters.

The trustees of Steve's inheritance invested the \$100,000 in a high-yield mutual fund that loaned the money at high interest to different corporations. Five of the companies were involved in international trade, but, unfortunately, some of their profits came from the exploitation of the land and the poor of South America, Africa and Asia. So each year, the \$100,000 produced \$9,000 in interest which was automatically sent to a charity that promoted self-sufficiency among the poor. But each year, the \$100,000 loaned by the mutual fund to the five corporations also made possible the damage to the forests, the land, the environment and the health of the people. The damage could be estimated at about \$13,000 to \$16,000 per year in American dollars.

Your time to act is always now.