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Socratic Colloquium

09/29/09

Bellerophon

The story of a man who fell.

It came as a shock. It wasn't his fault. Exile was a harsh consequence. But the decision had been made, and there was nothing he could do about it. Bellerophon plodded on in an unbelieving state, not fully comprehending what had happened. He had no real destination in mind, he just went. At one point it began to rain. He had nothing to protect him from the chill wind, and nowhere to go. So, he curled up beneath a rotting log and tried to sleep.

The sun rose, ending a restless night. Bellerophon shivered in the shade of the trees. He began to walk again. Soon he emerged from the dark woods into the sunlight, leaving him blinking. Pausing, adjusting to the light and soaking in the warmth, his stomach began to growl. He smiled, no, it was more of a grimace, as he remembered that it had been more than fifteen hours since he'd had something to eat. But, with nothing better to do, he continued down the path.

After several days of wandering, eating whatever he could find, Bellerophon arrived in the city of Tiryns. He made his way to the palace of the king, Proteus, who had helped him in the past. He was received in typical Greek fashion, showered with gifts, and feasting. After he had eaten his fill, he began to explain why he was there.

“...and because I was considered dangerous to the people, I was exiled,” finished Bellerophon. The wife of Proteus was smitten by the godlike Bellerophon, and his tale saddened her. She whispered to her husband, exhorting him to forgive Bellerophon

“This is a sad tale indeed,” began Proteus. “But I believe you, who I have known since you were but a babe, though there may be another side to the story. I, myself, forgive you of this deed, done in malice or not.”

That night, as they retired from the feasting, the wife of Proteus called to Bellerophon. But Bellerophon, not wanting to dishonor his host, and not wanting another crime to his name, refused her. This angered the unfaithful wife of Proteus, and she went to him, accusing Bellerophon of trying to ravish her.

Proteus was angry with Bellerophon for this. He would have, in his anger, strode into the room where Bellerophon slept, and killed him in his bed. But Bellerophon had feasted in his house, and Proteus did not want to invoke the wrath of Zeus, protector of the traveler. So he devised a plan.

The following morning, Proteus asked a favor of Bellerophon, asking him to carry a letter to Iobates, king of Lycia and the father of Proteus’ dishonorable wife. Bellerophon agreed to carry the letter. He was outfitted with provisions, and given a horse to ride. When he arrived on the outskirts of Lycia, he stopped for water and food. There he met a strange old man.

This man was wearing a dark burlap cloak, with a hood that concealed most of the face. As Bellerophon walked past him, the man leapt to his feet and grasped Bellerophon by the shoulder. A faint light seemed to be seeping out from under his hood. Then he began to speak.

“In your time of need, sleep in the shrine to the grey-eyed goddess and remember the child of the god of the sea and the monster slain by the favorite of Hermes.” Bellerophon didn’t think twice about this occurrence, but continued on his journey, brushing the instance off as a crazy man.

A short time later, Bellerophon galloped into the courtyard of the house of Iobates, King of Lycia. Iobates greeted Bellerophon warmly, and they feasted together. Bellerophon delivered the letter to the king, who kept it to read later in private. When most of the night had passed away, the bard was called out, who told the story of Theseus.

Theseus had to go to kill the Gorgons, three ugly sisters with snakes for hair. One sister, Medusa, was so hideous, that anyone who looked directly at her was turned to stone. Theseus was aided by Hermes, who gave him a brilliantly polished shield and a pair of winged sandals. By looking into the reflective surface of the shield, he was able to kill the Gorgons. As he sliced the head from Medusa, who was with child by Poseidon, the Pegasus, a winged horse, leapt from her body and sprang into the air. Theseus took the head of the Gorgon Medusa and put her head in a bag, and he left.

After nine days, Iobates opened the letter from Proteus. In the letter, Proteus told Iobates that Bellerophon had tried to ravish his wife, Iobates' daughter. Proteus also explained that since Bellerophon had feasted with him, he feared the wrath of Zeus if he slew Bellerophon. At the end of the letter, Proteus exhorted Iobates to kill Bellerophon. But Iobates, also feared the wrath of Zeus that would come by killing a guest.

The next morning, Iobates asked Bellerophon to kill the Chimera, a ferocious, fire breathing beast, who was a scourge to the people of Lycia. Iobates believed that Bellerophon would surely be killed in the fight.

Not wanting to kill a guest, he asked Bellerophon to help him and kill the Chimera, where he would surely be killed. As Bellerophon pondered the best way to accomplish this task, he remembered what the old man had told him about the child of the god of the sea and the monster slain by the favorite of Hermes. He realized that this meant the Pegasus, and decided to do as the old man said. He went that night to sleep in the temple of Athena.

As he slept in the temple, he dreamed that Athena visited him. She came carrying a golden bridle, which she laid beside him on the floor. Athena told him to approach Pegasus while it drank from a certain well. Then, he was to put the golden bridle over the horse's head. When Bellerophon awoke, the bridle was there beside him. He took it and bridled the Pegasus. Then he flew off to fight the Chimera.

The Chimera was a ferocious, fire breathing beast. She had the body of a lioness, with a tail that terminated in a snake's head, and the head of a goat arose on her back at the center of her spine. Bellerophon, even mounted on the noble Pegasus, was not able to get close enough to hurt her. Then, as he flew by and felt the fiery breath, he struck upon an inspiration. He took a lump of lead and fastened it to the end of his spear. This he thrust into the mouth of the monster, who's hot breath melted the lead. The molten lead flowed down her throat and cut off her airway, killing her.

After he had accomplished this task, Bellerophon returned to the palace of king Iobates. King Iobates was amazed that Bellerophon had accomplished this, but Iobates still wanted Bellerophon dead, so he sent Bellerophon on an even harder task, to stop the Solymi, a vicious Lycian tribe that had been ravishing the countryside. When Bellerophon, with the help of the Pegasus, accomplished this task also, Iobates was shocked. But he still felt that Bellerophon needed to die.

So, Iobates sent Bellerophon to fight the Amazons, the warrior women. When Bellerophon completed this task too, king Iobates had run out of tasks. So he sent Lycian assassins to kill Bellerophon. Bellerophon was able to escape and kill the assassins.

These feats convinced Iobates that Bellerophon was under the protection of the gods. He confessed to Bellerophon what he had been trying to do, and revealed the letter. Bellerophon refuted the claims of the queen Tiryns, and told his story. Iobates apologized and was forgiven by Bellerophon. As an act of goodwill, he gave Bellerophon one of his daughters to wife. Then, in

part because he was grateful to Bellerophon for ridding the area of the Chimera, the Solymi, and the Amazons, and because Bellerophon had shown skill and talent, Iobates made Bellerophon his heir.

When king Iobates died, Bellerophon became King of Lycia. He reigned well, and brought peace and prosperity to the region. As time went on, and Bellerophon drove enemy after monster after enemy out of Lycia, he began to take great pride in his strength. Towards the end of his life, Bellerophon grew so presumptuous and prideful that he believed he deserved a seat among the gods on Olympus. He climbed on to the Pegasus and tried to fly to Olympus. As he climbed through the air, something happened. Some say that as they climbed high into the air, the noble steed realized the folly of Bellerophon bucked him, and others say that Zeus sent a storm which sent Bellerophon falling through the air. Either way, Bellerophon was left falling from high in the sky, while Zeus took the Pegasus up to live with the gods on Olympus.

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