

Analysis Pt. 1

Dr Stockmann, scientist and Medical Officer of the Public Baths, discovers the truth: the water supply feeding the baths is poisoned. This truth requires a difficult action: the relaying of the bath's conduit pipes. Otherwise, the townspeople will eventually get sick and die. Stockmann knows the right thing to do is to inform the town of this danger and has no hesitation in his mind to do so.

Many of the towns leaders and influential forces support him at the beginning, including the head of the Housholder's Association and the newspaper staff at "The People's Messenger." Everyone seems to be encouraging Stockmann on his path. For a brief moment, he is the hero of the town, having opened his mouth to judge rightly, as we are commanded to do. (Prov. 31:9)

At first, this proclamation of truth doesn't cost Dr. Stockmann anything. He initially revels in all the positive attention. But as is often the case, standing up for the truth starts to threaten ease and comfort. Dr. Stockmann's brother Peter, the mayor of the town, reveals that the cost of fixing the baths will cause a substantial financial upheaval. He threatens Dr. Stockmann's supporters by promising that the taxpayers will be given the burden of raising the funds necessary for the bath's repair, as opposed to the bath owners who should be the ones with the responsibility. Although the alternative to fixing the baths will ultimately lead to death and destruction, the immediate inconvenience causes Dr. Stockmann's supporters to turn against him, placing their trust in a treacherous man and upon an insecure footing. (Prov. 25:19)

This is when Dr. Stockmann shines. He stands firm in his convictions - even when his supporters turn against him and the whole town labels him an enemy of the people, and in spite of him having lost the respect of the community, his position on the Baths committee, and potentially his livelihood. Truth is worth more than the monetary gain we can achieve; truth is freedom (John 8:32), and truth lasts forever (Proverbs 12:19) We are commanded to speak the truth, even if we are the only ones doing it. As the Apostle Paul wrote, "We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak." (1 Cor. 4:13)

INTERMISSION

Analysis Pt. 2

We must speak the truth, but we should do so in love – humbly, respectfully, and patiently. (1 Corinthians 13; Eph. 4:15) Although an admirable character in many ways, Dr. Stockmann is not without his flaws. As many idealists tend to do, he falls prey to his pride and stubbornness, because he is too concerned about people recognizing that what he says is right. He unnecessarily antagonizes Peter and doesn't listen to his wife's admonition to watch his temper. Peter's suggestions most likely have no merit, but Dr. Stockmann does not seem to be concerned about hearing what anyone else has to say.

Yet similarly, although Peter doesn't agree with Dr. Stockmann, he ultimately seeks to silence the doctor instead of reasoning with him, despite Peter's claims to be trying to do so. Peter manipulates "The People's Messenger" staff and incidentally the whole town towards trying to silence Dr. Stockmann. Because Dr. Stockmann says things that make them feel uncomfortable, the townspeople are content to stick their heads in the sand for the sake of feeling better about themselves for a season.

In today's America, it has become somewhat acceptable to advocate for silencing so-called "dangerous" ideas. Maybe someone is wrong, but that doesn't mean they do not have the right to express what they believe. Silencing people is the easy way out. It requires no engagement of thought, no critical thinking, and no healthy defense of a view that might very well simply be the collective majority opinion.

Allowing all points of view to be openly tried and challenged reveals flaws. Unless we are afraid to discover truth, we should be eager to discover what views will stand the test of examination and what views will be exposed as folly. It is easier to just label someone an "enemy of the people" – or, in today's equivalent, a "hater" – rather than cultivate humility, being teachable enough to ask someone to explain their view beyond what it appears to be or what we have been told. But as iron which sharpens iron, "The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him." (Prov. 18:17; 27:17)

Many people in our society, including some of our own leaders, would agree with Dr. Stockmann's acquaintances that there is some inherent morality in the will of the majority. But objective truth doesn't change with the majority's will. The majority once approved many deplorable things – slavery, oppression of women, even blood-letting. The majority is often fickle, changing at the drop of a new fad and based on emotion before fact, and it is dangerous to believe that that vacillating standard always has the moral high ground..

Dr. Stockmann rightly identifies this idea as a source of moral poison, but he doesn't really offer an alternative other than his own opinion. We must have an objective source for truth and morality outside of ourselves, or else we are always subject to what sounds good at the time, according to an emotion. God is that source of ethical authority – unchanging, with the basis for wisdom found in His word. (Malachai 3:6) The beginning of that wisdom starts with the fear of the Lord. (Prov. 9:10)