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One of the oldest ways philosophy has accrued and distributed its riches is by way of parable. It is traditional for a parable to be somewhat obscure in its meaning so the reader must reach into themselves to find the answer. Although this is the height of good taste, it leaves the answer open to question. This often allows the philosopher to posture in a cloud of obscurity, while their intentions are guessed at by the reader, and most likely, not clearly understood by the parable's author either. In the interests of clarity, I have added a short aphorism which has the essential meaning of the parable condensed into a single phrase. Please read and pause at the asterisk marks which end the parable, then guess for yourself. The answer is written below.

### *The Puerile Fish*

There is a forbidding place where some philosophers go, both the brave and the fearful may travel here, to the Lake of Knowledge. The lake is large, and the shore rocky and flat with nothing for miles, but rocks and books. A group of young philosophers went to the lake, to see if they could find inspiration, truth, or knowledge. Who knows what else might live under some old rock or book, perhaps a beautiful lizard would help them. When they arrived it was a terrible surprise. The journey was far too long, the terrain unforgiving and they were worn ragged and half sick when the lake appeared, so large and flat with a chill wind, a frozen curse of a wind which cut them to pieces, as it made the lake's surface shimmer. They held each other closely and gathered their strength, to approach the water and look. Soon they had all decided the same thing. This is where the action had to be, so they shielded and warmed themselves with pages torn from the many books, each leaf on the next to form a blanket now wrapped tightly around to block the wind. Some pages held down with stones and some leaved into the next, they huddled together, each under their blanket, and warmed themselves, safe under the pages. They warmed each other in conversation. "I have found a truth about the universe, and another about myself and knit them together. I like the re-spiritualization of God into self, and believe the Buddha nature most beautiful, must be true!" The rest agree, "Yes, you are most surely correct, and no one is more beautiful than you now. Surely you are adorned with a quilt of the most profound and beautiful truth!" He continued, "I also enjoy the certainty of rationalism, and have knitted these two together to form a warm and fine truth," and all agreed this was a handsome union of these two ideas, which was most warm and satisfying indeed! Each day they became warmer and enjoyed their reflection on the waters of the lake, and their quilts grew. Often they remarked about how beautiful their reflection became when they could steal it from the wind, as it rippled the water. When all was still and quiet, the vision they beheld was clear, and they were sure they had seen what they came for, the truth, and they would curse the wind for stealing it back. This bleak landscape offered them much, but lacked one thing. There was no food, and all were getting weak.

As their hunger grew, one among them began to find the smell of himself and his unwashed compatriots more than he could bear. He became so nauseous, he walked out into the wind alone, and found a place for himself a few hundred yards down the shore from his fellow philosophers. He was disgusted, and took one of his stones, wrapped a page from a book around it, and threw it into his reflection on the water. It sank right through the image, and he knew it was a reflection and not the truth. Then another unexpected thing greeted his eye from the depths of the lake. He saw a fish. Old

and ugly, covered in warts and sores, its pan eyes looked up at him with a familiar glaze, as if the fish had also been dazzled, its gaze also fixed upon the reflection of light off the surface of the water. When he saw its familiar eyes he was horrified and blushed, but he soon regained himself and looked closely. The fish spun around after one of its own droppings and gobbled it up, then another and a pause. It looked at him as surprised to see him, as he was it! Its mouth opened, a bubble came out and floated up to the surface. He put his head down and listened as it popped. He heard the fish speak out of this putrid bubble, a voice could be heard! "I'm right." He couldn't believe this impossible talking fish had said what it did, so he squinted and looked, then more bubbles and the words, "I'm right. Always. I'm always right." He could stand it no longer, his hunger was too great, and even if this fish was able to talk, so old and putrid with sores and filthy breath, he could not resist, and his arm shot into the cold water, his hand closed around the fish and he pulled it out from the water and swallowed it whole before he could think. He saw its hideous body and strange familiar eyes and ate it anyway much to his initial disgust, and he almost vomited it up, but his hunger would not be refused and he swallowed hard and the deed was done. Now he felt better, stronger, and his blood began to run again with food in his belly. His fellow philosophers had seen the entire affair and moved somewhat farther up the shore. Clearly he was a dangerous man.

The next day a sun beam fell through the lazy net of clouds and reached the lake. A rare mist formed, and out of this strange vapor stepped the God of the Lake of Knowledge, the Knowledge God. Gaunt, tall, tight-lipped and pale, he looked unwell and slowly moved toward the large gathering of philosophers. His reputation preceded him. It was said he spoke little, and asked only questions since he seeks knowledge, and a question mark is a hook for thoughts. As he approached the group, his sickly appearance was underscored by a churning sloshing grumble from his entrails. "Are you OK?" asked one of the weak, hungry philosophers, to which he responded, "I am hungry." All were amazed to hear something other than a question cross his lips, and so a palpable relief came over the crowd when he asked one of them, "What is your philosophy?" "I have adopted a phenomenology like Husserl's, and a spirituality of the universe and self which permeates the world as Dharma. I have made a beautiful quilt and all agree it is true. I am happy to be able to answer all of your questions. I am a complete philosopher indeed." All the others agreed she was and managed a collective weak anemic smile, safe in each other's arms. Another stepped forward and the god asked him, "What is your philosophy?" "I have found four pleasing truths which keep the wind away, and answer every question." Before he could read the Knowledge God the first few pages of his philosophical blanket, the nauseous rumbling of the god's stomach interrupted the discourse, and he shuffled quickly away, sick from their odor. He soon found the lone philosopher, who sat rosy cheeked and well beside the cold water. The Knowledge God asked his question and you could see his pallor improve to hear the answer, his godly shoulders rose and relaxed and he smiled. When the Knowledge God asked the lone philosopher, "What is your philosophy?" the reply was short and direct. He answered tersely, "I eat fish!"

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A truth filleted: The fish eater's philosophy in a sentence, "I seek knowledge to see myself clearly, so I may grow."