
A Trip to Henrik Ibsen's An Enemy of the People: The Scientists' Noble Pursuit of Truth at Any cost

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Abstract: *The present article investigates the reasons of struggles between a truthful man and a hypocritical person with followers in revealing the truth about the contamination of their town piped line water in Henrik Ibsen's An Enemy of the People. Ibsen uses the character Dr. Thomas Stockman as a hero of his play to distinguish god-like man from others. The hero is a scientist and medical doctor in a Godly way. He thinks truth telling is a duty of everybody specially a scientist. So human being with knowledge is God's agent on earth and must say the thing that is right. Ibsen wants his audience and readers to discover that our social problems comes out of our hypocrisy, lying, and lack of awareness. He poses the story of the struggle of a man with humane spirit equipped with knowledge, wisdom, and truth with the majority of hypocritical and deceived people. Ibsen likened this truthful man to a lion because of his bravery.*

Keywords: *Truth, Scientist, Hypocrisy, Lying, Struggle, Humane spirit, Social problems, Bravery.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Henrik Ibsen, as the father of modern dramatic realism who thought to be second to William Shakespeare, directly portrayed human behaviors on the stage and then analyzed them in a sociological and anthropological manner. This most famous Norwegian playwright called people to the truth in his An Enemy of the People. This play is deeply moral and deals with humane responsibility for their knowledge. He praised a man who puts his life at risk to prove his humane and scientific responsibility. Through the character Dr. Stockman, he posed philosophical and divine statements about human especially scientists' responsibility upon the earth. Through the mirror of Dr. Stockman, he unravel different kind of human beings who entrapped in fleeting pleasures of social key position such as mayoralty. He emphasizes that a man without trustworthy may ruin a society like the character Peter Stockman as the mayor of his town. He depicts an ideal world whose member is Dr. Stockman whose feelings, thoughts, opinions, and reasons paves the way for everybody. This drama opens the audience's eyes to appearance and reality around them.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

One of the big problems of people that threatens the society is lying which creates terrible actions. It is a big danger for humane development and social welfare. Lying is the source of human ill-treatments. Nowadays, some people produce a lot of goods which resemble to their real ones. Others also deceive people through a mixture of truth and lie. On the other hand we have many martyrs who risk their life and households to pursue what their consciences say. They prefer death to material welfare. So people can't trust each other in a contaminated society. Human untruthfulness leads to destroying the natural environment. Therefore, every society needs trustful men to recognize the problems and solve them. There are some great men who risk their lives helping others to have a healthy, peaceful, and happy life. They seek nothing except the sake of God. On the other hand, there are others who miss their humanity to get political and financial power. They see just themselves. In fact, human being is an agent of God on the earth. So he should do what God admires not people. The antihero of this play, selfish Peter Stockman and his deceived and timid followers cannot remove their hallucinatory political, social, and financial power as the enemy of the people that cause turbulence and danger for people's true savior like Dr. Thomas Stockman. Ibsen shows us Dr. Stockman as a symbol of God-fearing man who puts his life to inform people about unhealthy water. People's neglect is another kind of their enemy that causes them not to recognize and distinguish their friends from their enemies.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Is the trustfulness an enemy of the people?

- Are selfishness, ignorance, and trusting political authority the enemy of the public?
- Does appearance versus reality?
- Is there any motivation for a parrhesiastes to tell the truth?
- Can the majority recognize right from wrong?

4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* reminds us of Jesus Christ, Socrates, and Galileo's suffering from telling truth. He urges the audience to apply trustworthiness in their everyday life in order to have a safe life and society. Moreover, he urges the necessity of truth telling for scientists. That's why, healthy of physical and psychological matters much more depends on such scientists. Ibsen wants to clarify that knowledge should be a light on the way of a society where everybody should be able to take the acicula from the road. He goes further to show that scientists' silence provoke danger for their societies. Therefore, science should be a refinery for people to refine themselves. It should not be as a light in a thief's hand to choose the best thing in the dark. He portrays the historical conflict between the wise and the ignorant. He uses the character Dr. Stockman as the wise man and the majority of the people as the ignorant and deceived characters. We see Dr. Stockman's scientific findings as the essence of judgment for contaminated water and his conflict with city officials gains a high level of significance. So this sympathetic scientist struggles to fulfill what he aims. His resistance to malicious officials and the majority of the people just for the sake of God in telling truth signifies the concept of confrontation between good and evil. This play points out that Utopia is made when people respect the benevolent scientists and use their knowledge in order to enhance their awareness.

5. METHODOLOGY: FOUCAULDIAN PARRHESIA

The French philosopher and historian, Michel Foucault (1926–1984), claims that the word "*parrhesia*" first appeared in Greek literature in Euripides (c.484-407 BC). It is translated into English as "free speech", "to speak everything truthfully", "to speak freely", and "to speak boldly". The word "*Parrhesiastes*" means a person who uses parrhesia, one who tells the truth for common good, even at risky situation. Foucault uses the word "*parrhesia*" as a philosophical strategy of "truth-telling" to define and discuss humanistic and social scientific disciplines. He defines parrhesia as, "verbal activity in which a speaker expresses his personal relationship to truth, and risks his life because he recognizes truth-telling as a duty...the speaker uses his freedom and chooses frankness instead of persuasion, truth instead of falsehood or silence, the risk of death instead of life and security, criticism instead of flattery, and moral duty instead of self-interest and moral apathy (Taylor, 2011)". He also uses this method to examine the essence of one's true personality, and the quality of political affairs in the society. Through parrhesia, one's certain relation to himself or other people through self-criticism or criticism of others can be verified. It is a philosophical style of life and existence. This practical technique brought Jesus, Socrates, Galileo and other truth-tellers into deadly conflict with the authorities. Those truthful people believed in soul and its superiority to body. They did not fear any threatening things. Parrhesia is also an epistemological and spiritual exercise in which one learns to think differently in order to practice truth telling, directs towards self-sufficiency, and traces humanity. In fact, the whole mission of human being is to be trustful and to do trustfully. That's why Jesus' life and teaching was to reveal the truth. Referring to John 18:37, Jesus states, "For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth" (Finlan, 2013). In *An Enemy of the People*, Henrik Ibsen uses the character Dr. Stockman as a Parrhesiastes who wants to have a world with truthful men. This man of principle dedicates his whole life and sacrifices his own job and major source income in solving the problem of contaminated and unhealthy water of his town. This heroic fighter for truth thinks that the environment can be cleaned when the people clean their mind from mental pollution. The sources of mental pollution are lying, complacency, selfishness, and neglect counted to be the real public enemy.

6. SUMMARY OF HENRIK IBSEN'S AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE

There was a small town in Norway called the KIRSTEN SPRINGS. There was a truthful medical doctor named Thomas Stockman who found that some people of his hometown got sick. He was suspicious to the piped line water of his

town. So he secretly tested it and discovered that the poisonous dump tannery above the town polluted the water. He decided to publish his test results through an article in the newspaper of the town. He wanted the journalists, Aslaksen, Billing, and Hovstad, to publish his article and support him to reveal the truth about the water of the town. At first, the journalists supported him on words but they didn't publish his article and left him alone because the mayor Peter Stockman- Dr. Stockman's brother- persuaded them through threatening and bribery. The sixty-year-old mayor was very ambitious and selfish. He heard that his brother- Dr. Stockman- try to spread the truth about the contamination of the town water. He tried to persuade his brother at any costs to stop it, but he didn't succeed. Dr. Stockman said to him that he will reveal the truth at any ways and at any costs. That report might betray the authorities of the town. All his attempts couldn't prevent Dr. Stockman from telling the truth. The mayor created some problems and disasters for him and his family such as, firing Dr. Stockman from a medical institute, firing Petra- Dr. Stockman's daughter- from teaching at school, firing Dr. Stockman's sons- Morten and Ejlif- from studying at school, making the townspeople be antipathetic, furious and hostile towards Dr. Stockman through throwing rocks into his windows. The mayor, even prevented Captain Horster not to move and save Dr. Stockman with his family to America. Therefore, this man of letter stayed and fought for what was right.

7. DISCUSSION AND RESULT

Through *An Enemy of the People*, Henrik Ibsen aims to warn the audience and readers about the hasty judgment. He wants us that appearance versus reality. He reminds Jesus Christ and Galileo as historical truthful human beings. He uses the character Dr. Stockman as an example of true humanity in our time.

- This plays reveals us a paradox in human world where a person who tells the truth is the enemy of the people but a person who covers truth with businesslike manner, is the friend of the people. Peter Stockman is a friend just by words because he says " I don't make a habit of getting into people's hair! But I'd like to underline that everything concerning Kirsten Springs must be treated in a business manner (Act one)". On the other hand there is Dr. Stockman who tries to warn the people about the pollution of the water of the town. He criticizes his brother Peter- the mayor of the town- who tries to prevent him from telling the truth; "It's just Peter is so afraid that somebody else is going to do something good for this town(Act one)"
- Dr. Stockman is shocked that why human beings treat like blind rats; "how human beings can walk around and make judgments like blind rats (Act one)". Dr. Stockman tries to do everything in scientific and humanistic manner to make people have fair judgment, so he says; "I am quite clear on what has to be done.....I, a mere scientist, to tell politicians where to build a health institute!(Act one)".
- Like Socrates, Dr. stockman believes that the essence of human being is awareness and soul not care for body. Those who pay attention to body, suffer from existential vacuum and follow others like sheep. The meaning of life does exist not only in enjoyment and pleasure, but also in suffering and death. Seneca states;" Fire is the test of gold; adversity, of strong men"(Zubko, 1996). Here we have Dr. Stockman, a truth-teller who seeks honor just for the sake of God. He is unjustly called" the enemy of the people" that's why he does not follow others like sheep. He devotes his life to what he thinks that is true. Truth-telling people can't follow others. We cannot always say the votes of the majority are right. Jesus Christ was crucified in front of the majority. Galileo was humiliated in front of people and sentenced to prison. He was forced to deny his discoveries about the earth rotation around the sun. Here in this play we have Dr. Stockman was forced to deny his finding about the contamination of town water by Peter stockman-the mayor- who says: " I forbid you as your superior, and when I give you orders you obey (Act one)". Then he goes further: "Now go to your desk and write me a statement denying everything you've been saying, or... I'll send out a subpoena for you and begin a prosecution for conspiracy (Act three)". Dr. Stockman and his family were stoned by deceived people. There are few people who can distinguish good from bad and suffer everything in order not to change their idea. Dr. Stockman like historical truthful men says; "I am in revolt against the age-old lie that the majority is always right!.....Was the majority right when they stood by while Jesus was crucified?.. Was the majority right when they refused to believe that the earth moved around the sun and let Galileo be driven to his knees like a dog? It takes fifty years for the majority to be right. The majority is never right until it does right.(Act two)".
- Jobbery usually hides its ugly feature behind mask of sacrificing, knowledge, charity, and political power. So they buy and change everything by money and power. Lying, hypocrisy, sophistry, talkativeness, and prating are the

outcomes of money-grabbing and political power. The character Hovstad who was changed into a hypocritical character admits and confesses that political and financial power can hide truth; "Everything that matters in this town has fallen into the hands of a few bureaucrats.....They're all rich, all with old reputable names, and they've got everything in the palm of their hands....Under all their liberal talk they idolize authority, and that's got to be rooted out of this town.(Act one)". Dr. Stockman's words;" Yes, but they happen to have ability and knowledge(Act one)" confirms and completes Hovstads' words. Aslaksen, another hypocritical character also confesses that the power of money can make the majority be submitted to the minor rich men; "When the little businessman wants to push something through, he turns out to be the majority(Act one)". Peter Stockman, the antihero of this play, hoped to prevent Dr. Stockman from spreading the truth about the contamination of the town piped line water by money:" I had hoped that by improving your finances I would be able to keep you from running completely hog wild(Act one)".

- Truth telling is necessary for all human beings specially for scientists otherwise, knowledge can't be permanent. Galileo was threaten, Socrates was killed, and Jesus Christ was crucified because they all said the truth and insisted on their scientific ideas. So the mission of scientists is to tell the truth even if it is to their detriment. The essence of humanity is tested by truth telling. Dr. Stockman adheres to this principle and acknowledges that; "I am a doctor and a scientist....I have the right to express my opinion on anything in the world(Act one)". He believes that covering the truth by a scientist means that; "You want me to spit my own face(Act one)". In reaction to Aslaksen's fear(publisher of journals) about a new tax from mayor, Dr. Stockman poses the courage of a scientist in the face of anything; " Ahhhhh! Yes. I see. That's why you're not scientists suddenly and can't decide if I'm telling the truth(Act two). In Act three, he as a scientist declares that he has no fear of death; "I am ready to hang for my convictions! But no man has a right to make martyrs of others".
- Truth telling guarantees the permanent of a culture, if the culturists rely on it. Henrik Ibsen states this concept through his character Dr. Stockman;" Oh, God, on the wreckage of all the civilizations in the world there ought to be a big sign:' They Didn't Dare!'(Act three).
- Veith(2007) stated; "The lion is used in the Bible as a symbol of authority and power. The symbol is applied to Christ". A truthful man is likened to lion because of his bravery and fearlessness in telling the truth. Truth is permanent forever while hypocrisy and lying are temporary. Ibsen believes that the truth uncovers the ashes of falsehood on it someday. He reveals this issue through the mouth of his hero, Dr. Stockman;" The truth is coming! Ring the bells, sound the alarm! The truth, the truth is out, and soon it will be prowling like a lion in the streets!(Act three)". Ibsen believes that truth tellers are alone. They are lions that hunt their opponents-liars- even they are killed. They are the winners. The reason of their loneliness is truth telling. In Act three the hero of play says; "But remember now, everybody. You are fighting for the truth, and that's why you're alone. And that makes you strong. We're the strongest people in the world.... And the strong must learn to be lonely!".

8. CONCLUSION

Henrik Ibsen wrote the tragedy *An Enemy of the People* to show that there are different kinds of enemies that threaten people's lives such as people's neglect, fear, and their whole trust to their political authorities. He suggested that the people of a town should trust science in order to have a safe life. He also emphasizes public ignorance as another kind of enemy of the people. That's why they don't have enough knowledge, insight and foresight for surrounding phenomenon. So there should be a wise man to manage the community. Ibsen gives historical examples such as savior of mankind like Jesus Christ and real scientist like Galileo who tried to inform people about the facts. Hereby, he wants to demonstrate to his audience and readers that public ignorance is the great enemy of the people that causes direct troubles for saviors and indirect troubles for themselves.

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