

The Philosophy of Cavemen

by Alex Acuff

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The Philosophy of Cavemen

Cast of Characters

TAD.	<i>Middle age.</i>
BRET.	<i>Middle age.</i>
WINSTON.	<i>Middle age.</i>

Scene:

A primal camp outside a cave.

Time:

Hundreds of thousands of years ago.

*A (/) indicates where the next speech begins.

*No “caveman voices” should be used for any of the characters.

ACT IScene One
“Hard Rocks”

AT RISE: (TAD sharpens a spear at sundown. BRET skins a squirrel. The camp has various appliances for hanging up freshly killed animals, cooking materials, and whatever else a caveman might need.)

TAD.

I disagree.

BRET.

What's your counter?

TAD.

Awareness doesn't come first.

BRET.

Go on.

TAD.

Awareness can't exist without something else to come before it, and that something else is the place we live.

BRET.

How do you figure that?

TAD.

It comes first.

BRET.

Does it?

TAD.

Awareness is part of this place, but this place isn't a part of your awareness. You could have this place with no awareness, but you couldn't have awareness without this place. Awareness comes second to this place.

BRET.

Without your awareness, you'd never know there was a place.

TAD.

But, it'd still be here, with or without us knowing it's here. Well, let me ask you this: do you think awareness is solid?

BRET.

What do you mean?

TAD.

Like that animal, or this spear.

BRET.

(laughing him off.)

It's not a spear.

TAD.

Where does it go when we sleep?

BRET.

Hm.

TAD.

It goes away.

BRET.

Where?

TAD.

I'm asking you.

BRET.

Hm.

TAD.

There's not another place if awareness is solid.

BRET.

But—

TAD.

If awareness is solid, then it shuts off. We don't go anywhere. We stay here, but we're unaware of our staying here.

BRET.

I feel differently.

TAD.

Why?

BRET.

Um...

TAD.

Because your old people told you that?

BRET.

That's not the entire reason.

TAD.

Then...

BRET.

During sleep time, I go places. I don't stay here. I don't feel like I stay here. I feel like I go somewhere.

TAD.

How you feel isn't important.

BRET.

It's not?

TAD.

No, how you feel changes.

But—

BRET.

This place stays the same.

TAD.

I mean—

BRET.

The big circle rises and sets. The smaller circle follows; the other dots there for decoration, perhaps.

TAD.

How we feel doesn't change.

BRET.

Then why are you better today?

TAD.

Um...

BRET.

Huh?

TAD.

Well, I'm—

BRET.

You were bent out of shape because some girlfriend of yours got killed by a mammoth. Now today, / you're better.

TAD.

Her name was Rebecca.

BRET.

Good for her.

TAD.

BRET.

I'm not better.

TAD.

You look like you feel better. Earlier, you said how happy you were that you had killed that hairy-rat.

BRET.

Because I'm hungry.

TAD.

I didn't mean to bring that up.

BRET.

That's the thing: she left, so you think she went nowhere? You think that she doesn't exist anymore?

TAD.

The thing is—

BRET.

No other place?

TAD.

You want me to tell the truth?

(BRET nods.)

She's probably somewhere else and...she's got all of her favorite things. She's got her fur, her basket, and some berries.

BRET.

You think so?

TAD.

Yeah.

(Pause.)

How's that, uh, hairy-rat coming?

BRET.

Almost ready.

Winston should be back soon.

TAD.

(*sarcastically.*)
Great.

BRET.

Why'd you say it that way?

TAD.

No reason.

BRET.

You don't like Winston?

TAD.

He's okay.

BRET.

What do you have against him?

TAD.

BRET.
He talks about the wildest things. He talks about his hunts, the animals he kills, but not ideas like me and you.

TAD.

You and I.

BRET.

What?

TAD.

"You and I" is the proper way to say that.

BRET.

Say what?

TAD.
Not “Me and You”, it’s “You and I.”

BRET.
The proper way?

TAD.
Yeah.

BRET.
I’m confused.

TAD.
Like when you go to a learning cave, and there’s an older man teaching you things; he teaches you the proper way to talk.

BRET.
Learning cave?

TAD.
Did you never go to one?

BRET.
No.

TAD.
My old people sent me when I was ten cold times old.

BRET.
Not mine.

TAD.
Maybe eleven cold times.

BRET.
Well—

TAD.
Yeah.

BRET.

So then—

TAD.

You go and they teach you things. You don't have to hunt; they have food there for you. And you learn about ways to talk.

BRET.

Sounds like a waste of time.

TAD.

It's not.

BRET.

Who cares?

TAD.

Traders.

BRET.

It's not how you talk, it's what you talk about.

TAD.

There was one boy who had many things, and his parents still have many things. Apparently, they live in a big cave that never gets wet, or cold, and they wash themselves with water, and they have tons of food put away.

BRET.

A cave that never gets wet?

TAD.

Yeah.

BRET.

Or cold?

TAD.

I asked how his parents got the cave, and he said that they had to trade a lot of food and fur for everything.

How much food?
BRET.

An entire cold time's worth.
TAD.

AN ENTIRE COLD TIME?
BRET.

Yes.
TAD.

How could they afford that much?
BRET.

They know how to speak. They know how to talk to traders whose families have passed down their stored food to them.
TAD.

Well, we know how to speak.
BRET.

Sort of.
TAD.

How do we talk to traders?
BRET.

Find them.
TAD.

Where?
BRET.

(pointing.)
TAD.
They're that way for a long time.

BRET.
How long?

TAD.
Maybe ten or eleven big circles.

BRET and TAD eat the bits of squirrel. BRET eats with his hands, and is a bit messy. TAD uses sticks, and wipes his face with a leaf.

BRET.
You mentioned the big circle.

TAD.
Yeah?

BRET.
What do you think it's made of?

TAD.
We know it's hot.

BRET.
Do we?

TAD.
Yeah.

BRET.
How?

TAD.
When it rises, we feel hot.

BRET.
But you said how we feel isn't important.

TAD.
Sometimes, it is.

But— BRET.

The big circle is hot and it makes us hot. TAD.

What about cold time? BRET.

It's less hot, so we're less hot. TAD.

Maybe. BRET.

(picking his teeth.)
This stuff's so hard to eat. TAD.

Yeah. BRET.

What if there was an easier way? TAD.

What? BRET.

For getting food. TAD.

I mean— BRET.

You wouldn't have to hunt as much. TAD.

Then I'd spend more time thinking. BRET.

TAD.

What if there was a place you could go, tell them you want food, and they give you food in exchange for other things? Give them pretty rocks for hairy-rats, or water food, or trade pretty rocks with other people for better food. Wouldn't you trade pretty rocks, so you don't have to hunt?

BRET.

Yeah.

TAD.

So would other people.

BRET.

Valid point.

TAD.

We could have tons of food, and not have to hunt. And we wouldn't have to go in that direction to find traders.

BRET.

We'd have to do a lot of hunting at first.

TAD.

Yeah, but—

BRET.

So you're saying we should hunt more?

TAD.

Only for a bit.

BRET.

No.

TAD.

It's a great idea.

BRET.

You haven't thought this through.

TAD.

Why do you say that?

BRET.

More hunting means less thinking.

TAD.

But in the long run, you might never have to hunt again. You get enough pretty rocks stored up and you can buy enough food to last you, because you're trading the food for more pretty rocks than it's really worth.

BRET.

What moron would do that?

TAD.

Lazy morons.

BRET.

No.

TAD.

They don't want to hunt.

BRET.

So then—

TAD.

They'll give pretty rocks so they don't have to hunt. We do the work for them in the short term, but get more pretty rocks in the long term. Once we have a bunch of pretty rocks, we buy enough food to last us for way more than ten cold times.

BRET.

I see what you're saying.

TAD.

Then we sit back and eat in our new bigger cave.

BRET.

Bigger cave?

Yeah.

TAD.

What's wrong with this one?

BRET.

It gets wet.

TAD.

Yeah...

BRET.

Everyone else is doing things the way they're supposed to do things. We can do them in a different way.

TAD.

You have interesting ideas.

BRET.

Interesting?

TAD.

Yeah.

BRET.

Winston.

(enters, carrying a bow.)
Winston back.

TAD.

There he is! It's about time, you big goof!

Winston.

I no big goof.

TAD.

What took so long?

WINSTON.

Winston track animal. Also meet people. People give Winston new toy. New toy very good at kill animal.

BRET.

What people?

TAD.

Probably traders. What is that?

WINSTON.

Piece of wood with string.

TAD.

Can I see?

WINSTON.

Mine.

TAD.

How does it work?

WINSTON.

Wood with string go with tiny spear. Tiny spear go through air. Hit animal. Animal lay down and cry. I eat.

BRET.

Where's the meat?

WINSTON.

Winston ate.

BRET.

You were supposed to bring some back.

WINSTON.

Oops.

BRET.

What happened to the spear I let you borrow?

TAD.

It's okay.

WINSTON.

Winstron trade spear for tiny spears and wood with string. Wood with string and tiny spears better than big spear.

BRET.

What?

TAD.

We'll get you another one.

BRET.

That spear costs me five hairy-rats!

WINSTON.

(giving him the bow.)

Wood with string better.

BRET.

It's not!

WINSTON.

No yell at Winston.

BRET.

I don't know how to use this thing!

TAD.

(under his breath.)

Did you see any mammoths?

BRET.

I heard that.

WINSTON.
Big rat with tusk?

TAD.
Yes.

BRET.
Very big.

WINSTON.
Winston see other guy.

TAD.
Yeah?

WINSTON.
Other guy hunt with Winston.

TAD.
Go on.

WINSTON.
Other guy help kill big rat with tusk, and they have big meal. They sleep. Wake up, they hungry again.

TAD.
Yeah?

WINSTON.
They walk.

TAD.
Okay.

WINSTON.
They hunt more.

TAD.
Okay.

WINSTON.

They find another one.

TAD.

Yeah?

WINSTON.

He step on guy. Guy gone. Guy smooshed in ground. Big rat come after Winston. He run. Winston escape.

TAD.

That's all?

WINSTON.

YA.

BRET.

Not good enough.

WINSTON.

You go!

TAD.

And you didn't see anything else?

WINSTON.

NA.

TAD.

That's good, Winston.

WINSTON.

Thanks.

BRET.

Really good for him.

WINSTON.

(going into the cave.)

I lay down.

TAD.

You're the best, Winston.

(Pause.)

What's your problem?

BRET.

That idiot ate a full course meal of mammoth, and we're starving, picking the bones of hairy-rats. He shouldn't have given away my spear.

TAD.

Technically, he traded.

BRET.

It was my lucky spear, Tad.

TAD.

So?

BRET.

It was lucky.

TAD.

We'll get you another one.

BRET.

How?

TAD.

When we get more pretty rocks. For now, we can share my spear. I don't use it that much anyway.

BRET.

I don't trust the guy.

TAD.

Why?

BRET.

How many times has he come back without food? How many? Then he comes back and eats what I've hunted.

TAD.

What do you want me to do?

BRET.

Tell him to leave.

TAD.

I can't.

BRET.

Why?

TAD.

He's family.

BRET.

We're all technically family!

TAD.

I'll talk to him.

BRET.

That's what you said last time.

TAD.

I will.

BRET.

Listen to the way he talks. "Winston eat now. Winston hungry. Winston leave. Winston bring wood with string."

TAD.
So?

BRET.
He's an idiot!

TAD.
Hey...

BRET.
I've met rocks with more sophistication!

TAD.
Thought you said it doesn't matter how someone talks?

BRET.
When did I say that?

TAD.
Earlier.

BRET.
When?

TAD.
You said it's about what they say.

BRET.
He doesn't say much!

TAD.
He serves his purpose, Bret.

BRET.
What's that?

TAD.
He does hunting for us, so we can think more. Do you want to go back to just us two? Thinking half as much?

Thinking leads me to this conclusion.

BRET.

How?

TAD.

I feel that some things are right, and others are wrong. He borrowed my property, and didn't return it, without consulting me beforehand.

BRET.

You really care that much about a spear?

TAD.

It's the principle.

BRET.

You're not making any sense.

TAD.

It's wrong.

BRET.

Did you die?

TAD.

No, but—

BRET.

What harm has physically come to you?

TAD.

None.

BRET.

You're okay?

TAD.

Yeah.

BRET.

TAD.

Then how can it be wrong?

BRET.

There doesn't have to be physical harm for something to be wrong. It can be wrong because it's not treating someone with respect.

TAD.

Insulting my family isn't respectful.

BRET.

Well—

TAD.

By your own thinking, you're wrong.

BRET.

I didn't steal.

TAD.

He traded for something else.

BRET.

Causing suffering is more wrong than insulting. I haven't caused him suffering by insulting his intelligence.

TAD.

You haven't suffered.

BRET.

I have.

TAD.

Oh please!

BRET.

I'm without a weapon for defense.

TAD.
Your thinking is out there.

BRET.
What?

TAD.
It's not here. It's not grounded in this place.

BRET.
Right and wrong?

TAD.
Does right and wrong float in the air?

BRET.
What?

TAD.
Is it solid?

BRET.
I don't know what you're asking.

TAD.
Can you touch it?

BRET.
I feel it.

TAD.
(pokes him with his spear.)
Do you feel this?

BRET.
Back off.

TAD.
How you feel changes.

But— BRET.

Right and wrong is here. TAD.

I think that right and wrong is somewhere else. BRET.

Woah! TAD.

We're somewhere else. BRET.

What makes you think this? TAD.

Feelings. BRET.

From where? TAD.

Well— BRET.

Here! TAD.

It doesn't feel that way. BRET.

It's all here! TAD.

You say you have old people. BRET.

TAD.

(with a sniffle.)

I did.

BRET.

They had old people, and they had their own old people. Where were we when they were here?
We were somewhere else.

TAD.

No.

BRET.

Where?

TAD.

We weren't here yet.

BRET.

Then where?

TAD.

Right and wrong might not even exist.

BRET.

How can you say that?

TAD.

(making a face.)

By opening my mouth, like this.

BRET.

Rebecca getting squashed by a mammoth? That's not wrong?

TAD.

It's inconvenient...

BRET.

It's wrong!

TAD.

What do you define as wrong?

BRET.

Anything that causes another being to suffer. I can't sleep when the dots come out. And I see her during sleep time.

TAD.

I can't believe you see things during sleep time.

BRET.

I do.

TAD.

Do you see right and wrong?

BRET.

I see all kinds of things.

TAD.

Like what?

BRET.

It's hard to explain. I see things that have happened, and other times, I see things that haven't happened. Like, a few big circles ago, I saw me and you...you and I...doing what we always do. But other times, I see strange things. I see people, like you and I, going up to the little circle and then coming back.

TAD.

You're making this up.

BRET.

What do you mean, "making this up?"

TAD.

In your head.

BRET.

I see them during sleep time.

TAD.

You see them?

BRET.

Yes.

TAD.

Think about what you're saying; you see them, with your eyes, but your eyes are closed during sleep time?

BRET.

Well—

TAD.

How could you *see* them with closed eyes?

BRET.

I don't know.

TAD.

Have you ever seen inside a person's head?

BRET.

What do you mean?

TAD.

At a learning cave, they look inside a person's head after they die. There's a little squishy thing inside your head.

BRET.

A squishy thing?

TAD.

Yeah.

BRET.

How did they look inside the head?

TAD.

They take hard rocks and smash their heads open. It cracks like an egg. Then inside, there's the yoke, but it's a pink squishy thing.

BRET.

So then—

TAD.

That squishy thing is you.

BRET.

No!

TAD.

It makes sense.

BRET.

It makes no sense!

TAD.

How?

BRET.

How can squishy things make all of this?

TAD.

They don't.

BRET.

How?

TAD.

All of this makes squishy things.

BRET.

But—

TAD.

It does.

BRET.

(leaving.)

I'm not a squishy thing!

TAD.

Good talk.

BRET exits into the cave. TAD sharpens his spear and exits. The sun rises and sets and a few times. Blackout.

Scene Two
“Big Wheels”

AT RISE: (A few weeks later. BRET is preparing a squirrel to eat. WINSTON enters, pushing a big stone wheel.)

WINSTON.

Where be Tad?

BRET.

He’s hunting water food.

WINSTON.

Why he do that?

BRET.

(making fun.)

Tad say he tired of hairy-rat. He say hairy-rat not enough, and cold time come soon. He make sure have food, since others don’t.

WINSTON.

You make fun of Winston?

BRET.

No make fun.

WINSTON.

NA?

BRET.

No.

WINSTON.

Tad back soon?

BRET.

Yeah.

WINSTON.
Water food gross. Not big.

BRET.
Fine, more for us.

WINSTON.
Winston have this now.

BRET.
(seeing the wheel.)
What's that?

WINSTON.
It wheel.

BRET.
What's a *wheel*?

WINSTON.
It rock made with other rock.

BRET.
Fancy.

WINSTON.
It do this.
(rolls the wheel.)
See?

BRET.
That's interesting.

WINSTON.
YA.

BRET.
This is what you've been doing?

WINSTON.

Winston give other wheel trader. Trader use wheel to move thing. Trader give Winston food and pretty rock.

BRET.

For one of the wheels?

WINSTON.

YA.

BRET.

How much food?

WINSTON.

One wheel, one cold time food.

BRET.

One cold time?

WINSTON.

YA.

BRET.

For one wheel?

WINSTON.

YA.

BRET.

How many wheels have you traded?

WINSTON.

Lot.

BRET.

How many?

WINSTON.

Winston not have fingers to show.

BRET.

More than ten?

WINSTON.

Winston have own cave now. That why he no come here anymore. Winston have food, and cave that no wet.

BRET.

So?

WINSTON.

Winston need help make more wheels.

BRET.

Help?

WINSTON.

From Tad, no you.

BRET.

Wait, how many wheels do you need made?

WINSTON.

Lot.

BRET.

We can both help.

WINSTON.

No.

BRET.

Why?

WINSTON.

You dumb.

BRET.

Oh, I'm dumb?

WINSTON.
You make fun.

BRET.
I do not.

WINSTON.
Do.

BRET.
No, I don't.

WINSTON.
I no like you.

BRET.
Winston...

WINSTON.
I no dumb. You no like me, but you want food. You want big cave. Tad help, but not you. I no like you.

BRET.
If we both help, you'll make more wheels.

WINSTON.
So?

BRET.
You'll get more.

WINSTON.
No, cuz you take more.

BRET.
I wouldn't take hardly anything.

WINSTON.
Lie.

I can help.

BRET.

(leaving.)

Tell Tad talk to me when he get back.

WINSTON.

(under his breath.)

It's probably not even your idea.

BRET.

Winston smart!

WINSTON.

Sure.

BRET.

Winston make things. He think of wheel for big circles. He no speak great, but he make things. He make lot of things. Winston have other thing work. After wheel, next thing fire. Fire keep warm when small circle come.

WINSTON.

Fire?

BRET.

Hot thing.

WINSTON.

What do you mean, "hot thing?"

BRET.

It hot.

WINSTON.

Like the big circle?

BRET.

It hot when big circle not.

WINSTON.

BRET.

And you make this?

WINSTON.

YA.

BRET.

You're saying you can create warmth without the big circle?

WINSTON.

YA.

BRET.

You're lying.

WINSTON.

No lie. Winston never lie.

BRET.

Oh yeah? You said you'd bring my spear back, and traded it for the wood and string. You lied to me and you didn't apologize.

WINSTON.

Wood and string better.

BRET.

Why don't you go back to your "big cave?"

WINSTON.

NA.

BRET.

Go on then.

WINSTON.

Winston wait for Tad.

BRET.

Winston go.

Winston no go!

WINSTON.

Winston go!

BRET.

NA!

WINSTON.

I'm telling you to leave!

BRET.

NA!

WINSTON.

You traded my lucky spear!

BRET.

It not luck.

WINSTON.

(entering with his spear.)
I couldn't get any water food.

TAD.

There Tad.

WINSTON.

Winston! Where have you been?

TAD.

Places.

WINSTON.

That's obvious.

BRET.

You had any luck on your hunts?

TAD.

WINSTON.

No hunt anymore.

BRET.

(holding up his squirrel.)

There's no food, except this.

TAD.

Why haven't you been hunting, Winston?

WINSTON.

Winston—

TAD.

Cold time is coming.

BRET.

Yeah.

WINSTON.

(showing him the stone wheel.)

Winston have this.

TAD.

What?

WINSTON.

It wheel.

TAD.

A wheel?

WINSTON.

Winston carve with other rock.

TAD.

Other rock?