

Scott Garber's

Unconventional Wisdom # 104

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Apollo Gete and the Holy Grail

A Screenplay by Scott Garber

SCENE ONE

FADE IN

The camera zooms in on a pastoral clearing surrounded by deep woods somewhere in merry old England. There, on a fallen log beside a babbling brook sits our protagonist, the plucky Apollo Gete. This middle-aged but still-dashing figure is dressed like Robin Hood in a tunic and tights, but without the bow and arrows, for he is both a pacifist and a dreadful archer.

Lying on a blanket in the grass between Apollo and the bank of the stream is a scrawny runt of a man by the name of Fester McJester. This former court comedian is currently mired in a career crisis—brought about by his inability to distinguish between funny and just plain stupid. He does, however, retain the iconic symbol of his stock and trade, a Jester's hat. Fester is busy counting his fingers with the thumb of his right hand.

APOLLO: I say, Fester, what are you doing?

FESTER: Countin' me fingers, sir.

APOLLO: What on earth for? You do know the sum of your digits, do you not?

FESTER: In a manner of speakin', sir. I've always been told they was ten. But today I decided to investigate for meself. An' I keep comin' up with nine.

APOLLO: Could it be that you are forgetting to include the finger with which you are counting?

FESTER: Blimey, that would make it come out right, now, wouldn't it? Clever trick, that one. How have you been occupyin' yourself, sir?

APOLLO: I've been contemplating certainty, Fester.

FESTER: You don't say! Well, I s'pose somebody's got to keep an eye on it.

APOLLO: I'm looking, my friend, for a set of undeniable truths upon which we can rest our both our faith and our philosophy of life. A bulwark against the onslaught of modern society and its epistemological erosion.

FESTER: Wow! I had no idea we was in such dire straits, what with corrosion and all that.

APOLLO: You are a Christian man, are you not, Fester?

FESTER: Highly, sir. 'Specially when I'm bein' watched.

APOLLO: Good. Then you must accompany me, for I have decided to embark on an epic search for the Holy Grail—the Holy Grail of Absolute Truth. And when we find it, dear man... and when we find it... well then, I guess we'll have it.

Apollo twirls his index finger aloft in a moment of high drama and better-than-average finger pointing.

FESTER: Will it be far, sir?

APOLLO: Personally, I think it more than likely that God has deposited the Grail right here on his Chosen Isle. But there's no telling, Fester. We may have to search to the ends of the earth!

FESTER: Begging your pardon, sir, but I'm thinkin' that before we would get quite that far my hemorrhoids might be actin' up.

APOLLO: Then ride high in the saddle, dear Fester. Now, come, let's mount up.

The two adopt a skipping gait designed to imitate a canter, but they have no actual horses. Undaunted, they "ride" out of the scene, holding one cocked arm forward as if gripping the reins. Apollo adopts a loping stride, whereas Fester bumps along, jerking this way and that. His bouncing face comes into close-up view.

FESTER: Why do I always get the donkey?

FADE OUT

SCENE TWO

FADE IN

Apollo Gete and Fester McJester approach a Romanesque church. A young man in a long black robe with a clerical collar is out front changing the movable letters on the church sign. The sign reads, "Things You Can Know for Sure." Apollo sees the text and holds up his hand. He and Fester pull up and "dismount." Fester is walking with some discomfort as the two approach the preacher, who sees them coming and turns to greet them.

PREACHER: Hello, travelers. My name is Reverend Toussieur. Can I be of service to you?

APOLLO: Good day, Reverend. I am Apollo Gete and this is my good friend, Fester McJester. We are on a quest for certainty, seeking the Holy Grail of Absolute Truth.

I saw your sign, and it occurred to me that a man such as yourself might like to join us on said quest.

REV. TOUSSIEUR: Sounds lovely, though I certainly have no need of it. You see, I'm already quite certain about almost everything that really matters. For instance, I have very fixed opinions on the proper style of worship. And I am forever set against that bawdy Italian religious art, full of naked people and the like.

APOLLO: Hear!, Hear! Fester. Quite something, now isn't he? I don't know if I've ever met a man quite so certain in all my life. And such a young man, too. But just think, Reverend, if you help us find the Holy Grail of Absolute Truth, you'll be able to give actual reasons for your convictions. And though it may not increase your own certainty, think what it could do for your persuasiveness, not to mention church growth.

REV. TOUSSIEUR: Then, by jingo, I'll do it. For God and the King and all that. Just let me change into something a bit more suitable for riding.

He peels off his ministerial robe, revealing a gaudily-colored set of racing silks with spiffy leather riding boots. From an inside pocket he pulls out a small-billed jockey's hat, which he places on his head and then cocks to one side. Tugging twice on his vest, he turns to face his new companions.

REV. TOUSSIEUR: There, quite ready.

Apollo stares dumbfounded at the outfit, while Fester covers his nose and mouth in an ineffectual attempt to stifle his chortling.

APOLLO: You're sure?

REV. TOUSSIEUR: Dear man, I'm Toussieur, as always.

FADE OUT

SCENE THREE

FADE IN

The three horsemen are following a trail that runs along the top of a wide, open valley. They pass an elderly, stoop-shouldered gentleman shuffling along on foot in the opposite direction. He is wearing a cardigan sweater over his tunic. And he carries a stack of thick books under his arm.

APOLLO: Good-day, kind sir. What brings you so far out of town and all alone?

TRAVELER: I'm on my way to Arndtquiteshire.

APOLLO: Really? We have just come from there on our quest for certainty. We're searching for the Holy Grail of Absolute Truth.

TRAVELER: Oh, interesting indeed. And have you found it yet?

APOLLO: No, sir. In fact, had we already found it, I believe the quest would be over.

TRAVELER: Quite right. My mistake.

APOLLO: Think nothing of it, my dear man. I am Apollo Gete. And these are my companions, the Reverend Toussieur, and my old friend, Fester McJester. And who would you be?

TRAVELER: They call me Dr. Downt.

REV. TOUSSIEUR: A doctor of the medical sciences, sir?

DR. DOWT: No, of the philosophical sciences, Reverend.

APOLLO: Then you must have some interest in our quest for certainty as well.

DR. DOWT: Quite so. And all the more because I have so little of it.

REV. TOUSSIER: And how is that, my dear man?

DR. DOWT: Excessive learning, some might say. For I have acquired so much knowledge that I now know nothing at all. I can recite multiple theories about almost any topic, but, regrettably, I have no idea which, if any, of them are true.

FESTER: You, sir, have gladdened my day. For it seems that the two of us have arrived at equal levels of ignorance, but I with considerably less effort.

APOLLO: Well, then, returning to the matter at hand, how would you like to join us on our quest for the Holy Grail?

DR. DOWT: Oh, I couldn't bear to be such an imposition. For as you see, I am on foot.

APOLLO: Yes, sir, I see. And why, pray tell, aren't you riding?

DR. DOWT: Most experts agree that I am too old to learn.

REV. TOUSSIEUR: Poppycock!

APOLLO: Poppycock, indeed! We, sir, will teach you to ride in one easy lesson if you will but consent to join our humble party.

DR. DOWT: Then I accept!

They are seen slowly "riding" away, Dr. Downt struggling to keep his balance but gradually righting himself. The fading voice of Apollo is heard.

APOLLO: That's it, Doctor. Jolly good horsemanship for a beginner!

FADE OUT

## SCENE FOUR

## FADE IN

The foursome sits around a fire in front of a grotto alongside the road under a starry English sky. They are eating noisily from pewter plates and sipping from large pewter mugs filled with ale. The mood is jovial.

DR. DOWT: I had no idea what sort of culinary experience awaited us on this quest, but I must say that this Gruel a la Fontainebleau is just exquisite. Wouldn't you agree, Reverend?

REV. TOUSSIEUR: Without a doubt, good Doctor.

APOLLO: Reverend, I'm curious. In the absence of the Holy Grail of Absolute Truth, how do you manage to maintain such a high level of certainty?

REV. TOUSSIEUR: Simple, my dear man. Faith. A lot of faith. And then, of course, we in the Church discuss such matters of faith only amongst ourselves. Which reinforces our convictions and isolates us from doubting influences.

DR. DOWT: But if you never entertain any doubts, how, then, do you differentiate between convictions and assumptions?

REV. TOUSSIEUR: An interesting query, which, frankly, I have not heretofore considered. Though I'm quite certain that such a distinction would be irrelevant to the truly pious.

FESTER: (Standing up and stretching) 'Scuse me, gents. Nature's callin'.

APOLLO: And you, good Doctor, how do you manage with so little certainty?

The philosopher ponders this for a moment and then takes another sip of ale.

DR. DOWT: Not at all well, really. But how can I feel certain of that which I cannot demonstrate to be certain? Would that not be a form of self-deception?

Fester returns, hitching his britches, just as Dr. Downt finishes his comment.

FESTER: Now there's a thing I've never understood—how a man fools himself. One'd have to be right daft, wouldn' he, to not know the answer to his own trickery?

APOLLO: Well, this and other mysteries will all become clearer, once we locate the Holy Grail.

REV. TOUSSIEUR: Amen to that.

The others nod in agreement, as Apollo raises his cup.

APOLLO: To Absolute Truth!

ALL: To Absolute Truth!

DR. DOWT: (Aside) If it does, in fact, exist.

FADE OUT

SCENE FIVE

FADE IN

The pilgrims continue their journey up one hill and down the other, tiring and slowing each time as they approach the top. But the next ascent looks just the same as the one before, and the descents are familiar as well. In fact, the background scenery is an identical repeating pattern.

DR. DOWT: I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but I fear we might be lost. We've been riding for hours with no appreciable change of scenery.

APOLLO: Fester, this trail was your idea. Are we, as the esteemed Doctor suggests, lost?

FESTER: I don't rightly know, sir. Not bein' sure of where we are right now, it's hard to say whether we're lost or not. But we could stop and ask directions.

APOLLO: Bad idea, bad idea.

DR. DOWT & REV. TOUSSIEUR (in unison): Yes, very bad idea.

FESTER: Why so?

APOLLO: You're not married, are you Fester?

FESTER: No, sir, I'm not.

The other three exchange knowing glances. Apollo shades his eyes and scans the horizon.

APOLLO: Say, there's a fork in the road just ahead. Let's proceed and reconsider our options anon.

They ride ahead a few paces. To the right the road continues in a series of seemingly infinite undulations, similar to the trail by which they have come. A short distance ahead and to left the road rises dramatically, leading to an immense stone castle. It features a mammoth wooden door and sturdy rook-shaped towers at each corner. Music sounds, the kind reserved for important cinematic discoveries.

REV. TOUSSIEUR: By Jove, there it is! The home of the Holy Grail! God has most certainly led us here to both our destination and our destiny.

They wheel around to head up the new path, but Fester does not move.

FESTER: I dunno, gents. This road we was on, at least it was safe. There could be danger up that way.

DR. DOWT: I, too, have my doubts, dear boy, as to whether we'll actually find the Grail in this place. But I do know this—that I don't want to be alone, which is exactly what you will be if you take that path.

FESTER: Oh my! Hadn't thought of it quite that way. Perhaps, then, I'll fall in behind the faithful.

REV. TOUSSIEUR: And don't worry, gentle Fester. You're never safer than in the will of God.

DR. DOWT: And what of the martyrs, sir?

A dark, dissonant chord sounds, as they "ride" off toward the castle.

FADE OUT

SCENE SIX

FADE IN

They approach the castle door, which features an impressive horizontal latch and a giant iron knocker, nearly six feet in diameter. It takes the strength of all four men just to lift it. They let it drop, and as it crashes against the door it goes "ding-dong." Two guards lean over the upper wall, one of whom addresses the search party.

GUARD: Who goes there?

APOLLO: Four pilgrims, good sir, in search of the Holy Grail of Absolute Truth. You wouldn't be keeping it here within the confines of your castle, would you?

GUARD: No. To tell you the... absolute truth... (He looks at the other guard, and together they snicker at his pun.) You'll have to excuse us, sir. We don't get out much.

APOLLO: But you're quite sure it's not here? For if you are engaging in prevarication to protect the Grail, we shall have to construct a Trojan Rabbit and gain our entrance through deceit.

GUARD: Oh, I swear on the graves of all dead people, sir, that the Grail is not to be found within these walls. Nevertheless, I do congratulate you on your choice of the Trojan Rabbit ploy. A clever ruse, indeed, and one to which we again fell prey only a fortnight ago.

APOLLO: Very well. Have you, then, any idea where the Grail might be found?

GUARD: That would be at the Castle Celestial.

APOLLO: And where would that be?

GUARD: I fear, sir, it is in the direction from which you have come.

APOLLO: Not far I trust?

GUARD: I'm guessing some ten miles, sir. Sits just off to the right. And I was about to say, "You can't miss it," but then... Might I ask, gentlemen, why you didn't just stop and ask directions?

FESTER: Because they're married, sir.

APOLLO: We are much obliged for your help, kind guard. May I ask just one other question?

GUARD: By all means.

APOLLO: Why have you placed the latch on the outside of the castle door? Seems quite insecure, and perhaps something of a bother to open from your side.

The guard peers over the outside of the wall.

GUARD: Outside, you say? Is it really? Can't make it out from here, but we'll certainly have maintenance look into it. Could be the very reason why we don't get out much.

APOLLO: Well, then, we must continue our epic quest for certainty.

GUARD: Begging your pardon, gentlemen, but may we shower you with cows before you go?

APOLLO: I wish we could oblige you, sir, but what with this detour and all, we've got way behind time now.

GUARD: I beg you, gentle strangers. It's good for morale to let fly the odd cow now and again.

APOLLO: Sorry, but we really must be on our way.

FESTER: Sir?

APOLLO: (Still hollering at the top of his lungs) Yes, Fester! Oh, sorry, dear man.

FESTER: (Holding his left ear) Actually, sir, some fresh meat might come in handy. We're getting a little low on provisions.

APOLLO: (Looking up at the guard) Say, old boy, we're simply not up to an entire cow, but if you've a side of beef handy, we would welcome your generosity.

The guard yells something over his shoulder. The whirring of a large electrical saw is heard. Moments later a side of beef comes flying their way out of a catapult, scattering the pilgrims. This is accompanied by shouts of "Brilliant" and festive wahooing from the inside the castle grounds. The travelers re-



gather, admiring the side of beef and then peering up toward the top of the castle wall.

APOLLO: Thank you ever so much!

GUARD: No, thank you, kind sirs. This has been the highlight of our day—yea, our very week.

The guard disappears into the interior of the castle, amid continued sounds of merriment.

FESTER: Right nice bloke, that one.

REV. TOUSSIEUR: Without a doubt.

DR. DOWT: Speaking of doubt, Reverend, what do you make of your certainty that God brought us here to find the Holy Grail? One may, you see, be certain of that which is not itself certain.

REV. TOUSSIEUR: My certainty that God brought us here remains unshaken, though I may have been confused as to His motives. You will note, dear Doctor, that we go away with a lovely side of beef and aware of the location of the Castle Celestial, without having to suffer the indignity of stopping to ask directions.

APOLLO: Sorry to interrupt, gentlemen, but it is now too late in the day to make our way to the Castle Celestial before tea. So, I say we make camp, enjoy this fresh steak that has fallen like manna from heaven, have ourselves a nightcap, and renew our journey tomorrow, refreshed and ready to bring to a happy terminus our quest for the Holy Grail!

THE OTHER TRAVELLERS IN UNISON: Hear! Hear!

Apollo thrusts his hand, flat palm down, into the center of their circle, and all the others do the same, one hand atop another. They then lift their hands together, creating a starburst effect at the top of their collective reach, as they raise a shout.

ALL: To the Holy Grail and a bottle of ale!

FADE OUT

SCENE SEVEN

FADE IN

The four travelers climb a steep hill to the Castle Celestial in single file. The castle is resplendent, its façade of pure gold glistening before them. It is much taller than it is wide, with steeply spired towers adorned with precious gemstones, along with a few costume rocks way up high where nobody can tell the difference. As they approach, a man in a gilded costume with a long white beard opens a small hinged shutter just above them and leans out.

MAN: Welcome, travelers! I am the sage in charge of the Castle Celestial.

APOLLO: (Stepping back, as if startled.) Oh, yes, good day. We are pilgrims in search of the Holy Grail of Absolute Truth.

MAN: I see. Say, would you mind moving about a rod to your right? You are stationed in the handicapped area.

APOLLO: So sorry. Our mistake.

They shuffle sideways some sixteen feet.

APOLLO: Now, back to this business of the Grail. Does it reside within these castle walls?

SAGE: Yes, sir, it does indeed.

APOLLO: We have come a long way to lay hold of it and to make it our own.

SAGE: Then I'm afraid I must disappoint you, sir, for the Holy Grail cannot leave this place.

REV. TOUSSIEUR: May we at least see it?

SAGE: No, you may not.

DR. DOWT: A thousand oaths! I never believed they'd let us near it.

REV. TOUSSIEUR: You never even believed it existed!

DR. DOWT: And we still don't know that it does if he won't let us see it.

APOLLO: I beseech you, dear Sage. Is there some motive by reason of which you deny our petitions?

SAGE: Well, for one, if we gave the Grail away to everyone who came here asking, it would have been gone a long time ago. And second, it's too dangerous to let you in. You might try to steal it.

APOLLO: Do we strike you as a band of knaves, sir?

SAGE: Not particularly, though I'd not be inclined to trust the fellow in the fancy riding ensemble.

APOLLO: I beg of you sir! We must see the Grail.

SAGE: There is yet another reason why you cannot do so.

APOLLO: And that would be?

SAGE: It's invisible, sir.

APOLLO: Invisible?

SAGE: That's what I said, sir. Invisible. The Holy Grail itself is just a metaphor, for one cannot see Absolute Truth.

DR. DOWT: Oh dear, we really should have thought of that before coming all this way.

The others nod in agreement.

APOLLO: Do you mean to tell us, oh sage, that there is no Absolute Truth?

SAGE: Not at all, my dear pilgrim. Just that Absolute Truth exists only in the mind of God. So, you cannot possess it for the simple reason that you are not divine.

APOLLO: But may we at least apprehend it in some fashion?

SAGE: Why, of course. Anything you know that coincides with God's knowledge is absolutely true. You just can't know that thing absolutely, in the same way that he does.

REV. TOUSSIEUR: But we can be certain, can we not?

SAGE: Good gracious, yes, my man! You can be as certain you like, or as certain as your faith will allow. Just realize that your subjective sense of certainty neither constitutes the object of your certainty as true nor defines the nature of that truth.

DR. DOWT: Are we not then left with skepticism?

SAGE: That depends—on you. There is a difference between finite understanding and ignorance, so it is not wise to limit your options to absolute knowledge on the one hand and skepticism on the other.

DR. DOWT: But I, sir, am a philosopher. I care little for the good Reverend's sentimental certainty. I seek certainty of a more objective order.

SAGE: However religious you may or may not be, good doctor, all knowledge ultimately requires faith. Faith in your faculties, faith in reason, faith in the quality of the available information. If you have faith in God, then you also have access to those things that only he knows but has chosen to share with his creatures. And if not, then you are limited to human sources of truth.

Perhaps this smaller slice of truth will seem more satisfactory to you. But just realize that this decision will distance you even further from the Holy Grail. In order to approach Absolute Truth, you must draw closer to the One who knows it.

APOLLO: These are wise but difficult words, sir. But there's still one thing I don't understand. If the Holy Grail is only a metaphor, then why are you so concerned that we might steal it?

SAGE: Excellent question. Suffice it to say that we've had some experience with such thievery around here. In fact, humans have been trying to possess absolute truth ever since the Garden of Eden. So, we no longer place the forbidden fruit on

the lower branches.

There ensues a pause just long enough to make it clear that no one knows what to say next.

SAGE: Well, then, I hope this has been helpful. However, I haven't yet heard from the gentleman in the jester's hat. I'm wondering if you, sir, have a question or comment you'd like to make.

Fester looks startled at having been addressed, and fidgets uncomfortably, apparently weighing whether or not to speak.

FESTER: Thank you very kindly, Mr. Sage. That was all quite lovely, though there were a few bits I didn't quite catch. I do wonder, though, sir—might I bother you for an autograph?

SAGE: Dreadfully sorry, old boy, but there's only one "Celebrity" here in Celestial City, and he chooses to work behind the scenes. You do understand, I hope. Policy and all that.

At that, the four travelers "ride" off with their heads hanging low. Apollo Gete leads the way. Rev. Toussieur and Dr. Downt proceed side-by-side. Fester brings up the rear, his "donkey" still teetering this way and that.

APOLLO: Gentlemen, I do so appreciate your kind company on this, our epic adventure. And I do hope you're not too terribly disappointed that we are returning without the Holy Grail of Absolute Truth in hand. I do trust, however, that the Grail is somehow closer to our hearts.

DR. DOWT: I must confess, fellow travelers, that I doubted even the existence of the Holy Grail at the outset of our journey. So, to have come within a hairsbreadth of Absolute Truth itself and to come away convinced that such a thing does, indeed, exist—for me this far more than recompenses the small inconveniences we have endured.

REV. TOUSSIEUR: I, on the other hand, was already awash in certainty before this quest began. But I have learned that, alas, absolute truth is not something that we can make subject to ourselves but something to which we ourselves must become subject. And while I remain Toussieur, I will hereafter be content to be just sure enough.

FESTER: (Pulling ahead of Dr. Downt and Rev. Toussieur to ride alongside Apollo) If you didn't know at the beginnin', I'm sure you all know by now how I lag far behind the rest of yas when it comes to learnin'. The fact is, I am a fool, and a professional fool at that. So, I wouldn't know an absolute truth if it looked me in the eye.

But here's what I did learn on this trip. Because you invited me, and you accepted me—treated me like an equal, you did—I learned that... well, that I belong. And that right there, that's my Holy Grail. Sorry if you didn't quite get yours.

And by the way, when we get back home, don't be lookin' at me to take care of your horse. Every man is responsible for his own steed.

At that, Fester's "donkey" ceases to flail spastically to-and-fro, and he adopts an affected air, prancing jauntily in the saddle, as our truth-seeking adventurers disappear into the setting sun.

FADE OUT

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