

THE HOUSE

AN ANALOGY OF SALVATION

By Charles Chesnutt

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For God so loved the world that He gave
His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes
in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

John 3:16

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“Buy the Truth and sell it not.”
Proverbs 23:23

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For Mary
who knows God

and for the stranger
who gave me the paper

About the Author and this Book

The author is a bankruptcy attorney in Dallas, Texas, where he has resided since 1979. He is married and the father of four. After graduating from Dallas Theological Seminary in 1983, he returned to the practice of law, not having received God's call to a different ministry. He is an ardent student of scripture and has been so since completing seminary. He is an evangelist and an author. He publishes his works without charge on BIBLEBOOKS.CO (Proverbs 23:23) and publishes a website that argues for creation ex nihilo from the perspective of design in nature. That website is located at CREATIONDESIGN.ORG. His professional website is located at CHAPTER7-11.COM.



The House is the true story, by a rather general analogy, of the author's journey to Christ. But, in essence, it is the story of the journey of all Christians to Christ because we all must enter through the same door. The work is written from the perspective of a young boy learning of life and searching for something that he could not define.

The House is short and it is intended to be read from start to finish in one sitting. It should not be read in increments nor should the reader find the ending in any manner other than by beginning on page one.

Charles R. Chesnutt, Sr.

June, 2013

The Hall of Philosophy

It all seems so simple really, so very black and white. But there is a missing piece, you know, and that's the problem. I am searching for something and I don't know what it is.

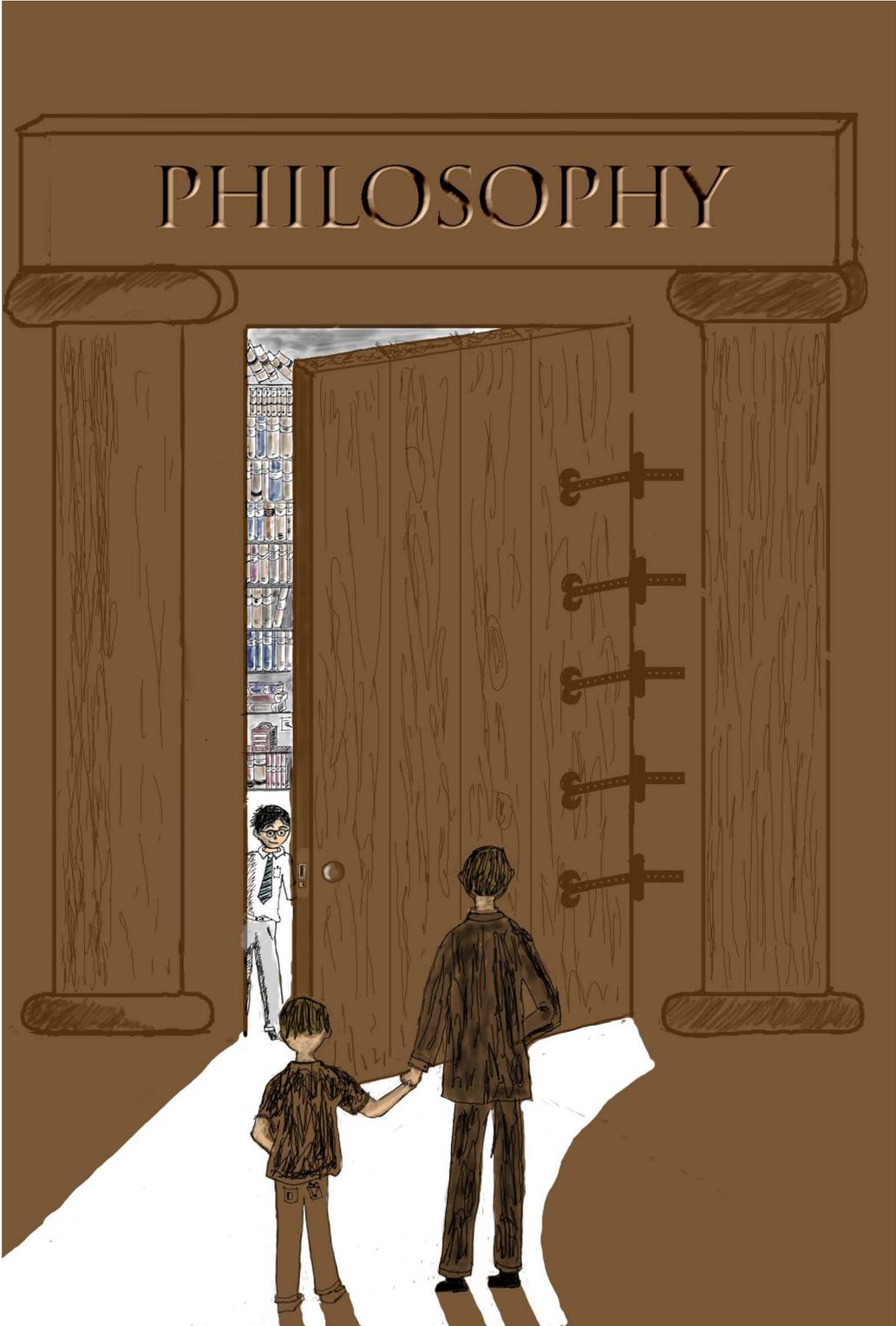
I was certain that I would find the answer in the Hall of Philosophy. But I never did. I searched for several years there listening to all their questions about reality and such. I studied every question and each answer was so logical. But I never found the real answer; all I really found was more questions. It was as if each new answer led to another question. Or maybe I just never really understood. Much of the failure, I am sure, was my fault because I was going to ask them straight out, but could never bring myself to it. I felt like they would know if anyone did, but it was so very embarrassing to ask.

I remember literally being in my Father's arms in the Main Hall the first time I saw the carved mahogany entryway to the Hall of Philosophy. How magnificent it was - and still is. No one knows how old it is and they keep the columns polished almost to a sparkle. No lights are necessary. They would detract from its silent elegance. But it was not only special. It was like, you know, God. It had no flare, no attraction, just solid wisdom. There is no other entryway on the entire Main Hallway that can compare to it. The Hall of Science is close, but it lacks the solidity that the mahogany columns give to the Hall of Philosophy. It is more elegant than the Hall of Mathematics and, of course, the Hall of Pleasure is garish beyond description when compared to Philosophy.

Inside of Philosophy are wizened old men who sit in leather chairs with large tomes set high upon shelves in a silent library. Everything there speaks of hidden knowledge. Even as a very young boy, I could not stay away. I knew even then that ultimately I would be a candidate there.

And, when I came of age, indeed I was, and it was my father who did it.

I still remember that evening when we walked out of our door and down to Philosophy and they opened the door to me. He was so very proud, and so was I. I felt like I was on the edge of something great, and I could hardly believe it when they accepted me. I stayed there for almost three years.



The first thing that I discovered was that there are sometimes different answers to the same question. It is not at all like Mathematics where there is just one answer. And in Philosophy, each of the different answers opens into entirely new rooms of reason and systematic logic. Sometimes the answer depends on what room you happen to be in. I think everybody should spend some time there.

I liked it until I began to suspect that no one really had all of the answers. Each of the answers seemed to lead to another question, and I was ending up with more questions than answers. And I never really got to my own question.

I began to suspect that the professors were just as interested in the questions as they were in the answers, and I could not find the place where it all came to a final conclusion. Whenever you got to where you were trying to get, it seemed like there was always something back behind you that was just a little out of place.

They were all so very wise but I knew that in spite of how smart they were none had the answer for my question. And I often wondered if some of them were dealing with the same riddle but never spoke of it—just like me.

So, one day, I found myself back in the Main Hall looking for a different way.



The Hall of Wealth

They say it's not really gold. But from the shine on the top of the columns in the entryway to the Hall of Wealth, they could be solid gold. The columns are white marble and the bottom and the top of each one is either gold or perhaps gold leaf. I do not know which. But the door is always shut and you have to have an invitation to get in. They don't even answer the door unless they know you. My uncle got me an invitation to work in that hall as a page. It was amazing.

The first thing you realize in the Hall of Wealth is that numbers are everything. Everything has a number to it. They have numbers for the size of doorways, numbers for the kinds of doors, numbers for certain areas, numbers for the kind of chairs you sit in. They have numbers for the kinds of offices, for how deep the carpets are, numbers for the color of the bathroom water faucets, numbers for the jobs and numbers for the people who work the jobs. High numbers are good and low numbers are not so good.

Everybody there works and they get numbers. The numbers determine everything about your life so numbers are very important. And when you start they tell you the number that you will get for your job. Everybody either knows your number or they can guess it and you have to relate to everybody according to your number and their number.

My uncle told me that you start out with a low number and then you work your way up to higher numbers. That's what I did, or at least that is what I tried to do, because the number they give to pages is pretty low.

Most everybody was working for higher numbers and the higher the numbers they got, the harder they seemed to work. And after they got the higher numbers, they had to work harder to keep them because everybody wanted them.

I did everything that they told me to do, which was mostly going and getting things for people with higher numbers. I went to get lunches and dinners; I took boxes from one place to another; I helped move chairs and set up projectors and screens for presentations and placed microphones on tables and sometimes I just sat and watched.

I am convinced that some of them were looking for the same thing that I was looking for. But the Hall of Wealth was the easiest place to ignore it because everything and everybody was so very nice.

The people with higher numbers were more intelligent, more attractive, more powerful, more respected and generally much better people than the others, although many of them never really produced anything but numbers.

For me, all of these added benefits of the numbers made life so much more, well, interesting, and made it so much easier to focus on numbers rather than “the problem.”

And if the truth be known, I loved the numbers, too, and after a while I was working for numbers just like everyone else. And I ended up with a lot more numbers than when I started.

But numbers were not what I was looking for, and the problem was becoming more like a kind of internal emptiness or void. It became more troubling as time passed and not even numbers would fill it. So I left.



The Hall of Pleasure

I now find myself back in the Great Hall again and, quite frankly, I am wandering. I am wandering because I do not know where to go next. But I see the gateway to a hall that I have heard of but never visited. Its entrance-way is broad and beckoning and lighted. Across the top of it is written "Hall of Pleasure."

It is said that this hall contains great stores of lovely and elusive temptations, and I wonder whether the time has come for me to taste them. I carry with me the wisdom that I had acquired from the thinkers in the Hall of Philosophy and the numbers that I had gained in the Hall of Wealth and I decide that it is my turn now to sample the pleasures of life. Perhaps that is exactly what is needful for me at this time of life. I will let their intoxications flow into the void inside me and they will give me peace.

As I enter, I am surprised to learn that despite its rather sordid reputation, this hall contains no readily apparent evil. There are no disreputable persons, no sensuous women of the street attempting to entice me, no strangers in leather jackets hawking illegal powders, no salubrious movie houses or cheap bars.

Instead I am finding old friends and others that I would like to get to know. People I don't know welcome me like an old friend and they are very accommodating to me, a stranger. I am content with their company and we speak of many things. We speak of where we have been, what we have seen and I learn the ease of *dolce far niente*, and it spreads its comforting arms around us all and holds us well into the evening. It is easy to stay here.

Pleasure comes in many forms in this place and I am seeing that too often those pleasures which are necessary and good merge with those that are "inappropriate." It is hard to draw the line between them because the consequences become so terribly vague when one is living on the cusp of temptation. I can see that one must decide beforehand where the line will be, otherwise you will always move it. It is easy to step over the line; and once you do, even for just a minute, when you look back you can hardly believe how far back it is.

As I complete my passage from being introspective and philosophical to becoming a man of the world, I see more of the facets of life, but the problem bedevils me still. And it renders even this hall to be incomplete. I am coming to the point where I am admitting that the void is a part of life

that must be accepted. There is no true contentment to be found, even here in the Hall of Pleasure. This ever-present specter of emptiness never ceases to haunt me. What good are these pleasures? Is there really nothing more?

I know that I don't belong here. I can feel it, but I don't know where to go. I will wander out into the Main Hall again.



The Hall of Religion

Out in the Main Hall again I move into the crowd and find the Hall of Religion off to my left. It calls to me and I respond perhaps because much of my life has been spent riding upon the delusion that work or pleasure would somehow cover or substitute for the missing piece. Or perhaps it is because of a progressive fear that in the end I will finally have to admit that the void is simply inescapable. Or perhaps it is because of an inherent realization that if there is a God, then taking care of the void is his job. And if he is anywhere, he is in the Hall of Religion.

It is all of these things that turn my thoughts to religion. It speaks to that something in me that I cannot define.

I enter its gates and I am greeted with all manner of people, all of whom are so very nice. They are like old friends, and I am excited to be here because I can tell that many of these people are searching for the same thing that I am. Although no one speaks of the void outright, I can tell that this is where people like me go. I am going to like it here; I am like they are.

The first thing that I see in this marvelous place is that there are so many rooms that I will never be able to understand them all. Each room contains an entire structure of metaphysical and philosophical concepts that point to God. And some rooms even have to have adjoining rooms just to hold it all. I am going to enjoy just looking. The challenge for me will be to find the room that I like the best. I am sure that I will find it.

After a short time here, I acquire several mentors and see clearly that the answer lies in simple faith. Because faith itself is a reality, and God dwells in that reality. It is faith that is important, not method. The method is only a means to the end but it is faith, true faith, that is the way. It is only through faith that one can find God and discover peace.

This profound realization brings me to a greater understanding of life and of who I am. I am a seeker searching for a credo and for a God. I am searching for a faith to be my rock and then I can move forward.

Armed with this understanding, I take the most fascinating step of all. I begin to nudge into various rooms in the Hall of Religion. I look, taste and sometimes question the various methods that mark the way to God. I find the thoughts, the leaps of faith and the creeds to be as interesting as the trappings on the wall and the robes of the people there.

They are all expressions of an inner reality, an inner God, if you will, the product of millions of years of physical and spiritual evolution. The deeper I wade into my chosen path the clearer it all becomes. Faith is the way and God is the center, the ground of our being.

Before I realize it, I have spent many months in the Hall of Religion and I have learned so very much. And I know that I will eventually arrive at that place of completion.

But sometimes, I have to admit that I wonder exactly what it is that I am believing. Sometimes, when the evening comes to a close and I find myself in a quiet place I ponder how someone can simply choose to believe in something that they have not seen. But I avoid that haunting question of whether God is really there. Because if he is not, then what is the use of faith?

Of course, the authorities and mentors in the Hall of Religion have answers for these questions. They are quick to tell me that there *is* a God and I will find him eventually. They say that everyone has these doubts about God, but I continue to ask myself why is he silent? If you think about it, we really have no idea who or what God is because each pathway defines him differently and he doesn't really say anything. There has to be a God somewhere, but you have to really want him to be there in order to find him. He is nebulous but he is somewhere, I am sure. Each of us must find him for ourselves.

The trouble is, I really haven't met anyone who can honestly say that he has found him. And I am having more and more trouble wondering what actual relevance he is if he doesn't really do anything.

So, I walk toward the Main Hall to collect my thoughts. I hear the murmur of the crowd as I near the entryway. I watch their shadows pass like wraiths over my feet and I slowly walk out into the middle. I fear that I am beginning to believe that no one has the real answer, and this is a fear that I do not want to face. Perhaps the real goal of it all is to avoid knowing that there is no answer and to never look inside and find that there is nothing there.

About half an hour passes and I see a street-figure approaching me as if he wants to talk. He is in his twenties. He is nondescript, a non-person. I can tell from his face that he is going to come up to me and I know that I will have to respond to him briefly. I can tell from here that he is strange. He wants something I am sure.

"May I tell you a secret?" Says the figure.

“No thank you.” I respond. What possible secret could he ever tell to me? Weird.

He looks at me and says these words, “You can find God if you go outside” and he hands me a piece of paper and walks away.

This is the first time that I have personally encountered one of these people. I have heard of them before, but I have never actually spoken to one. Maybe that is why I am so unsettled. I never want to see another one.

However (and I want to be very clear here), I do not judge him. If he wants to believe that there is an outside, then I am happy for him. It is his crutch and I would never disillusion him by telling what reality actually is. Things like that are good for people like him and I would never be one to challenge him. I wish him no ill. I should have given him some pocket change.

And now, right on cue so to speak, a man of God approaches me. He is wearing his robes and he is from the Hall of Religion. His demeanor and everything about him speaks of faith. He is well educated and friendly. His arm is around my shoulder and he helps me to return back into the hall where I belong.

He reiterates what I have always known, that is that God is somewhere and my faith will bring me to him eventually. Faith is a matter of choice and God responds to all people and to all faiths. God is a rewarder of them that seek him. He is a God for all, not just for some. He is no narrow-minded deity. He opens many doors and all of them lead to him. I will stay on my chosen path.



The Paper

But after more time in the Hall of Religion, I again stray into the Main Hall. I have reached the point where I am repeatedly wondering why believing for believing's sake is not an exercise in self-deception. How can believing in something that one does not really know exists ever be helpful for anything? I am not willing to say that God does not exist, but despite all of the time and effort I spent in the Hall of Religion, I am ready to admit that I have not been able to find him. And I don't know of anyone else who has found him either.

I wander down the Main Hall and find a bench and step up on it. I gaze over the heads of the crowd that is moving slowly up and down. In the distance I can see the doorways that I have never entered. There is the Archway of Science far down on the left, and on the right is the Hall of Art and then the Hall of Music, and farther down there is Theater, Mechanics, Mathematics, Medicine, Law, Electronics, and others as well. I look at these portals of humanity, these doors that are supposed to lead to all that is good and all that is great, but I must confess that they seem to be just so many empty promises.

Inside of the halls are fine old men and women, masters of life who are there to make life complete and make it good, but they can do nothing with this thing inside of me that never sleeps.

How many of them carry the same silent scream?

They work their marvels within their fields and they speak from the insides of doorways and they have acquired all that can be given to them, but they cannot touch the one thing that I must solve before any of these things can ever be what they promise to be.

I watch them and I wonder. What am I seeing? Am I looking at a corridor of gold or is this a midway with ticket booths and barkers grinning? These doorways are everything and they are nothing.

I sit down and inside my pocket I find the crumpled paper that the stranger gave me. Across the top of it is written, NOT FOR EVERYONE and below it are the words, "There is a God and He is outside."

What fools! The children who write these things are living an illusion.

Don't get me wrong, I do not judge these people; and I know they really believe the things that are written on their papers. I know they too must deal with reality; they too must try to turn this life into what it cannot be. They are searchers as well. But really. There *is* a limit. Reality does have its place and imagination, as lovely as it is, must at one point yield to reason or we will be forever lost in these dreams of God and visions of a spiritual wonderland.

You are a fool, stranger. There is no outside. Get used to it. I did. What you see is all there is.

Of course, there may be a God, I really don't know, but one thing I do know is that wherever he is he is not "outside." God is within us. God is the embodiment of all essence. He is the center, the core. He is the Credo, the Principle of what we all must live for. All spiritual expressions lead to God. And if we believe hard enough we will eventually ...

This is all there is. It has to be.

But there is a map on the other side of the paper and I want to follow it just because I am curious. I read it.

After an hour of walking, the map takes me to a narrow hall without a door. It is poorly lit. I hate places like this. But, fool that I am, I follow it, and I come to a small door near the end of the hall. Over the door is written just one word, "Christ." I open the door and find another dimly lit corridor. I am insulted that anyone would demean Christ in this way. It is narrow and the lights hang from the old ceiling on wires; there is a musty smell and I am afraid. I walk the entire hallway and I finally come to the door that is marked on the map and on the door is written the word "Outside."

I find another paper pinned to the wall to the right of the door. It says, "God has created the house and everything in it, but you are separated from Him because of the lies that you have told, because of the pride that you have loved, because of the people you have used, and because you have loved darkness and pretended it was light."

Oh my God. This is so Sunday School. God is a god of love, not hate.

"These things," it says, "have caused you to die inside. The void is the spiritual part of you that is dead. And you are far more dead than you know."

I am not happy with this. I should throw this ridiculous paper away and go back to the Hall of Religion.

The message says that the death inside me is eternal and it will consume me in the end. But Jesus Christ died for me. It says that He paid for my death with His death. He became sin for me. It says that I can choose to have the benefit of what He did if I trust in him and he will give me life. This life, it says, is free for the taking. It is a gift.

This is so terribly childish. It is demeaning, primitive.

It says that the gift that He gives is eternal life and that His gift will fill my death-void with life. I will experience the presence of God. It says that God will make Himself known to me.

Quite frankly, that is the first time anyone ever told me I could actually *experience* anything about God. Everything that they have been talking about in the Hall of Religion is how to have enough faith just to believe that God exists.

However, in order to know God I must open the door.

This is crazy. Everyone knows that there is no outside, so opening the door is not a reasonable act. And not only that, by opening the door I am admitting that I have done bad things and I am not ready to admit that.

But the door is in front of me and it is only a door, one of many doors that I have tried.

On the back of the paper are these words, "Christ is the door."

I don't like this. Christ is not a door. And if I open this door I will find out for certain that there is no outside and that there is no God. And I don't know if I am ready for that or not. And this thing is silly anyway. This dying for me theme minimizes and denigrates God. Christ was a great teacher, but he didn't die for anybody; the cross was an example, not a payment. God is not something that needs to do that.

And God is not something that is accompanied by the non-person like the boy who gave me the paper, and God is certainly not to be found in a back hallway that smells vaguely like a stable. God is the center of our being. He does not communicate with us by writing on doors or on paper or anywhere else. He is the ground of being and all that, and he is not really, you know...anywhere.

But this door is in front of me and I must leave or I must try it.

And the paper says, "I am the way."

This is not for me. There is no "way." I need to go back to the Hall of Religion where I belong.

"I am the way."

I am going to take this paper and shred it when I get back. No one should have to go through this condemnation. Where is my companion when I need him? I don't need this abuse.

Over the doorknob are these words, "If you are insincere, you may turn the knob but the latch will never catch."

This is ridiculous, completely ridiculous and I am not going to do it.

But, in reality, this is just one more door to try. It may be true that nothing ventured is nothing gained, but by God, if I am going to try this I am finished with pretending.

OK, God, let's get honest. If you are there and I tell you that I believe in you, you're going to know I'm lying. And I don't have any more faith than what is necessary just to turn this doorknob. But I will try because I don't have a thing to lose. So, God, for what its worth, I am placing all of my faith, whatever it is, in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of all the wrongs that I have ever done. I am trusting in what Christ did by dying on the cross for me. And God, if you really are there, and you will give me the peace that I am looking for, I will give you everything I've got."

I turn the knob and I feel the latch engage. The door is opening.

In the crack of the door I am seeing an intense light. It is blinding me because it is so bright. I raise my arm to shield my eyes and look down. I push the door wider. My eyes are closed because of the light. I feel air moving as if by fans, but I hear no fans. I take a step into the room. I smell a freshness that I have never known and there is softness under my feet. My eyes are opening slowly now and I see green grass growing out of the floor. As my eyes become accustomed to the intense lighting in this room, I look for the opposite wall and it is so far away that I cannot find it. Now I am looking upward into the light and I see ... I see blue, blue everywhere...oh my God, my God, my God, there is no ceiling. I am outside!

