
Fueling a Philosophical Los Angeles

Many would argue that Los Angeles is one of the greatest modern cities in the world. With most of the Midwest United States being relatively homogenous in terms of ethnicity and political ideology, the multicultural centers shift to the East Coast and especially the West Coast. California is the largest state in the United States and is the economic and technological hub that produces many products and provides many services that fuel the economy. Within that large state is the well known city of Los Angeles, famous for having UCLA, praised for its multicultural attitudes and displays of such in its art and cuisine. With so much to say for such a flourishing city, many individuals would say that projected growth and innovation for such a city can only get better, but has it? On the other end of the spectrum, realism rears its ugly head into the picturesque city of Los Angeles. Various complaints such as degrading infrastructure, rising state and city debt, homelessness, increasing socioeconomic gap and increasing political unrest paint another very cynical picture contrary to the one many tourists see.

With such strikingly different perspectives of such a grand city, many would wonder which is right or wrong or if perhaps they both can be at the same time. Why is it such a great city have less issues rampant with this modern age or grown more in its grandeur? One very troubling answer to that question lies less in the city but in its people. The saying of 'if isn't broken why fix it?' has unfortunately become the case for the citizens attitudes toward Los Angeles. If the city still stands or is not in anarchy why fix it? Attitudes such as this is not quite apathy but of complacency. What fuels this attitude seems to be the lifestyle so distinct to this city of industry, wherein the citizens work and earn and live but are not concerned for why. The values that drive so many to their destinations leave one too many people unfulfilled or even on the streets of Los Angeles without a home. The values and lifestyles of Los Angeles are driving many people in many directions without them wondering why they have been driven there in the first place. It seems the city itself has reached a threshold in its innovation that has left more to be desired. In order to solve such a pressing issue, one must examine such values and lifestyles of those in Los Angeles and whether the city can be saved from such damaging complacency.

In examining the city itself, one aspect that stands out the most sadly is not the skyscrapers or the beaches but the multitude of freeways that snake through the landscape. The citizens use these freeways unaware that such a mundane act of driving to work can become integral to their way of life. Understanding which freeway goes where, shortcuts and evaluating traffic has become part of how citizens in Los Angeles live. People even go through the lengths of downloading applications on their phone or waking early to watch the traffic watch on the news to avoid any inconvenience- they want the quickest way from point A to C. With inconvenience that comes, however minor, even instances of road rage have risen on the streets and freeways of Los Angeles. The freeways themselves are indicative to something even deeper at that: fixation on the destination. They were created to bypass the slowness of traveling by side streets which in Los Angeles but have created a very particular tunnel vision mindset. While being focussed on one aspect at a time is for the most part recommended, being focussed on only going to work or only going to one place without having the experience of traveling past and through different areas numbs the individual to anything that is not relevant to their intended destination. With the mindset that anything that is not accomplishing A to C is inherently bad, that principle can be detrimental to the overall experience of life and the pursuits of happiness

other than A to C. Not only that, but there mere act of fixating on a single destination is a mindset that prevents the individual from examining things or ideas other than that single idea or thing. The lifestyle of commuting as a Los Angeles citizen creates the conditions for single-mindedness where nothing else matters than achieving a goal no matter what it is or why we pursue it.

With the idea of a goal in mind, Los Angeles has very peculiar goals regarding its socioeconomic classes. Many of those from the realms of poverty, lower and middle class desire to move up from their disposition by attaining wealth. With money, issues such as debt, paying the bills and being able purchasing luxurious trips and items can come easily. Those who work, are going to school to attain degrees or are doing both are doing so in the hopes of getting money which seems to be the cure all for many of the woes that plague everyday life. But after buying oneself luxurious items, paid for trips to wherever their hearts desire, paid off their debt and their house what comes after? Does achieving such goals truly bring happiness? And if one does not achieve such wealth does that mean they have not achieved happiness? Many who have achieved even going from poverty to upper middle class find themselves unhappy and even those who find themselves in the highest positions of society find themselves not truly fulfilled. The goals set by society are reflected by the people and the way in which they choose to live their lives. When such goals leave more to be desired and result in unrest in varying forms then there is not only issue with being unhappy but why the goal has not made the individual happy. When the status quo of society fails to provide fulfillment to many, but no one questions its validity, an endless cycle is formed. In order to break this cycle, one can look to a time in a city similar to Los Angeles, whose status quo and lifestyle were put to question among other things.

The age that one can look to for reference is the Hellenistic period. This period is the peak of Greek influence and power both in its expanse and in its accomplishments. The Hellenistic period is more-so characterized by the dissemination of Greek colonies in Asia, India and even Africa. Like present day Los Angeles that seeks to preserve the past cultures and its glories, so did those who embraced Hellenistic culture. Within this period of Hellenism arose different schools of thought that derived some of the principles of the famous Athenian philosophers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. However, philosophers of this era took to analyzing different aspects of life and even tried describing the nature of reality in the realms of metaphysics. The schools of thought that will be focussed on to apply to state of Los Angeles are Stoicism, Cynicism, and Peripatetic philosophy. These philosophies can aid in understanding why the citizens of Los Angeles, despite all the accomplishments and progress, are dissatisfied.

Stoicism is a school of Hellenistic philosophy that was strongly influenced by the philosopher Socrates. Founded in early 3rd B.C. by the Hellenistic thinker Zeno of Citium, the philosophy of Stoicism centered around the idea that personal ethics must be made according to or in cooperation with the natural world. Contrary to the current meaning of stoicism which typically means being void of emotions, the philosophy of Stoicism did not seek to make its followers disprove or stop feeling emotion but merely to understand them. The process of understanding them and transforming them to create concise judgement and inner peace was called "ask?sis".