

AP English Notes  
October 25, 2004

Often great works of literature are associated with philosophical concepts. To enable students to discern one of these philosophical ideas, a very brief introduction to the Still Point concept of philosophical thought will be presented.

*Still Point Philosophy*

Individuals may temporarily leave everyday life on the wheel. The individual may experience a sensation that is all-powerful and encompassing in which he feels that he understands and is in tune with the creative force of the universe. Thus, the individual, at least for a brief period, believes that he knows the purpose of the world; in other words, he knows that he knows. However, the human cannot remain at Still Point and survive; therefore, the individual returns to the perimeter of the wheel, but he carries with him this new awareness found at Still Point. An individual cannot reveal to others his knowledge gained from the Still Point experience; there are no human terms that express the new awareness. Some humans can sustain the experience and carry it with them throughout the remainder of their days. Other individuals quickly lose the knowledge once they return to everyday life on the wheel.

T. S. Eliot suggests that the **Still Point** of the universe may be attained in three ways.

An individual can reach Still Point through Nature. Perhaps you have stood on a beach and watched the waves pounding the shore; you may have felt for a split second that you understood the madness of this world. To a degree, then you have experienced the knowledge and awareness at Still Point. These moments are not planned; this awareness simply occurs when one loses oneself in nature. This experience can occur anywhere in an outdoor setting or in one's memory of a scene of nature. Eliot chose to call this path to Still Point "the way of the rose garden."

A second avenue to the awareness of the Still Point is Pain and Suffering (The Dark Night). When a human has lost all hope--has plunged as far downward as possible--then, there, in the midst of that nothingness, he may reach out and find Still Point. Eliot suggests that often the path downward is the path upward. This is not to say that everyone who despairs will find the path; the philosophy only suggests that there is a possibility within apparent hopelessness.

A third path to the Still Point is the way of the Saint or Grace. The saint does not seek the experience; instead, the saint is chosen by the Creative Force (God) with a purpose in the revelation. Thomas a'Becket has a moment of bliss, a "wink from heaven" (Eliot 70) which propels him to the Still Point [the axis of life]. After this experience, his way is clear; he knows he will become a human sacrifice for the church.

Eliot states in the Four Quartets that at the center of the wheel is the dance and no movement(119). This line of poetry simply means that the experience takes place outside of the human concept of time; that it is essentially a

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moment of timelessness within time; and that at the Still Point there is movement without movement.

This diagram presents the Still Point Philosophy. Think of Still Point as the axis of life where time does not exist.

