

# X-Plain: Haiku & Syllogism

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The following is an attempt to introduce haiku and syllogism as two different approaches of the human consciousness. It's an attempt to look at one of the myriad of facets of consciousness, through the prism of haiku and logic. It is also a short comparison between the "Eastern" poetry and the "Western metaphysics" and their different ways of perceiving the reality. X-plain uses the logical path of syllogism leading to "definitions" in the realm where things have to be "explained"; and the path of haiku dealing with sudden insights into ourselves and our environment that leads to the realm of "the infinite." This is the world of intuitive awareness, shared by others, where insights, like an unknown "X" factor appear in a "plain" way—not fully explaining everything, not expressing all the details of the image, but leaving room for the free play of the imagination. To say it with Robert Spiess: "A genuine haiku cannot be fully explained and needs no explanation."<sup>1</sup>

## *The Analysis of Reality*

First of all I'm going to say a few words about the analysis of reality, to learn about syllogism. The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle developed a logical method to prove whether a certain statement was true or not. He defined the syllogism: "A discourse in which, certain things having been supposed, something different from the things supposed results of necessity because these things are so."<sup>2</sup> The most famous example of a deductive syllogism is the following: All humans are mortal. Socrates is human. Socrates is mortal.

premise 1: All humans (*M*) are mortal (*P*).

premise 2: Sokrates (*S*) is human (*M*).

conclusion: Sokrates (*S*) is mortal (*P*).

There are four types of syllogisms:

	1. Type	2. Type	3. Type	4. Type
<b>first premise</b>	M – P	P – M	M – P	P – M
<b>second premise</b>	S – M	S – M	M – S	M – S
<b>conclusion</b>	S – P	S – P	S – P	S – P

Every syllogism has to follow this structure, otherwise it is not a valid one.

But back to our given example. The first sentence, called premise reflects the general experience that all human beings are mortal. Even if we avoid considering the death of others and our own death, we know by evidence that people have to die. This is the so-called first premise. If the first premise leads to a logical conclusion that is not true, the evident premise is false and failed therefore, even if the logical structure is valid and following one of the four types. An example for an valid but false syllogism:

Peter is fat.  
Peter is human.  
All humans are fat.

The second premise is the proof that a particular person is also human. This has to be evident from the first premise. Finally, after suggesting both premises, which are obviously true, the last step is the conclusion. If all human beings are going to die, one particular human being has to die, too. If the conclusion is that Socrates, in our given example, is immortal, the first two premises would be wrong. If the first two premises are right, the conclusion can never be a contradiction. Socrates has to be mortal or not, but he cannot be both or something else. The so-called 'Impossible Third' is an axiom of the logical structure.

So far with the classical syllogism. A very interesting example for a “haikuesque syllogism” has been given by the cyberneticist and anthropologist Gregory Bateson:

Humans are dying.  
Grass is dying.  
Humans are grass.<sup>3</sup>

Although this is not a valid syllogism, since the conclusion does not work with the required structure of the mentioned types above, it seems that the classical logic leaps forward here to something new. Does it leap into

Bashô's frogpond? One may also think of Bashô's famous poem:

*natsugusa ya tsuwamono-domo ga yume no ato*

summer grasses  
where stalwart soldiers  
once dreamed a dream<sup>4</sup>

Or another one:

*tomokakumo narade ya yuki no kareobana*

somehow, in some way,  
it has managed to survive—  
pampas grass in the snow<sup>5</sup>

### *The Reality as a Miracle*

Now we have an idea of what a syllogism is. But what is a haiku? This question, or more likely the answer, might have brought most of you to read and write haiku. So everyone is free to muse about their own or an additional definition that does not have to agree with the following statements. A haiku is: “An open secret”<sup>6</sup>, as Robert Spiess, the longtime editor of *Modern Haiku*, said once. “A wordless poem”<sup>7</sup> as stated by Alan Watts. Or my own definition: “A haiku is a brief arrangement of words (using concrete language rather than abstract terms) that records an insight into nature and/or human nature (including human creations), and all relations between.”<sup>8</sup> But what are the similarities of syllogism and haiku, and what’s the difference between both? One thing may be obvious at first glance: the similarity of form. Both syllogism and haiku usually appear in a three-line format, at least, since most haiku written nowadays in Western languages appear in three lines. But more important than the three-line format is the use of three different elements in a syllogism as well as in a haiku. I have already tried to show the triadic structure of a syllogism, but I haven’t yet in the case of a haiku. A haiku written in three lines or fewer, uses at least three elements too: subject, predicate, object, according to the grammatical structure or requirements. For example one of my own haiku: “spring light fills the hollow stump.” But even in a haiku without a verb, in a haiku that consists only of two words, we’ll still find the triadic structure. For example in George Swede’s “stars    crickets”<sup>9</sup> or my own: “her sms

lilac scent”<sup>10</sup> In both examples only two objects are mentioned, as a bare juxtaposition. The connecting factor, the third element, is the perception, or more exactly: the awareness. It seems that the human mind works in a triadic way: thesis—antithesis—synthesis; subject—perception—object, and so on. It seems that we need this triadic structure to come to a full realization of the reality. Those of you who are religious may think of the Christian trinity or the triadic system of divine in Hinduism. These are the similarities, now we have to hear about the differences. A haiku is not an analysis of reality, it is the realization of something unique within the cycle of seasons and times—of something special that arises and disappears maybe soon after. A haiku is—to say it using the terms of the dialectic logic—a synthetic judgment that doesn't announce the judgment, it only shows a situation as it is, often using a juxtaposition, and our experience creates the meaningful connection. Thus the haiku says something new about the world, without assuming an axiom. A haiku provides a simple observation of the moment's movement. The image and the meaning become one, or, to say it with Ezra Pound's words: “The object is always the adequate symbol.”<sup>11</sup> The haiku does not state a conclusion, the haiku implies different layers of content and usually ends with an unexpected insight. A haiku does not give a definition, a haiku gives a description of what exists. It doesn't end with a conclusion, but offers a kind of punch line. A haiku expresses the unsayable within or beyond the lines. As examples, I dare to use two of my own haiku:

a new year the footprints between graves”<sup>12</sup>

nothing written on the trailhead sign spring hike<sup>13</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The human mind or consciousness works in a triadic way. The logic of a syllogism explains the relationship of a special condition to a general state. But the syllogistic method produces an inflexible pattern of considering the real world. This means that a fact, once proved by the logic system is an axiom, an unchangeable state. In that respect, the logic of the definite refers to the world of yesterday, to the past, and to its own logical pattern rather than to the real world, whatever this might be. In this context a haiku does not explain the reality, since a haiku provides a plain and wide space for various associations as well as a big X factor for individual interpretation with a freedom to explore the daily miracle by any particular reader. A haiku leaps out of time because it is rooted in the moment, and the eternity is not a

vast amount of time, it is the absence of time, or using the words of Augustine: “the basic time is eternity.” Certainly, the logic of the definite has been, and is still, useful for multiple scientific purposes, but we shouldn’t forget that life is always what it is now: a daily miracle, a moment rooted in the realm of the infinite.

#### REFERENCES:

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