

8/31/21

In the Stream of Consciousness

Chapter 17C – Part Two: Beware of False Labels, and When You are Wrong

The first story we read is the most controversial in the book, and we took umbrage with a number of points, while admiring others. A lot of our conversation was related to the family planning aspect, and I'm going to leave that out so we can focus on the essential, indicated by the title: False Labels. Bill wondered if Nataraja Guru would say the same thing about population today; the time and place was very different. We might expect he would have.

Deb indicated at the beginning that we humans are prone to argue over the way we label things, while ignoring the main ideas. She thought we would all agree that substantial change and values, like the meaning of family, come from within, and are weaker when they are imposed from outside.

The story itself is an example of talking at cross purposes. Nataraja Guru was arguing against forced sterilization, while the student was speaking of family planning in principle. Most of us support some form of family planning and oppose mandatory sterilization, but the Guru and student never got out of their respective perspectives enough to join forces. I did feel the argument must have stimulated a lot of pondering by the student. Arguing can be very constructive, energizing us to expand our purview. Disagreement produces a potential for enlargement of expression, when carried out with respect.

Deb repeatedly had to remind us that we were stuck on the topic of over-population and birth control, but we hadn't gotten to the bigger point: how we argue in labels and sound bites. She finds this at its worst on social media, which encourages maximum brevity, and it's really frustrating for her. Respect is usually absent, also. Hostility grabs jaded attentions better. She lamented how

much we put our preformed opinions out and refuse to listen to other ideas.

Andy agreed that sound bites are rigid, as if you have made up your mind forever about an issue. By contrast, from what he can tell none of our gurus are ideological, and none of them are ideologues.

Steven took issue with idealization of the family in the story, as a place where everyone is free to develop their own potential. Growing up, he had to fight his family every step of the way, and sees family ties more as a hinderance. He spoke of the serious challenges for gay or transgender kids living in a rigid, straight family. He's very grateful that there are institutions outside the family to help people develop their own potential.

Jan affirmed that in the ideal sense, support would be the role that parents and family would play, ensuring that every individual has the right to be themselves.

Paul empathized with Stephen, as his family was very controlling, adhering to an unbending religious belief system. There were rules by the church, the family, the town—rules about everything—and there was no option to do anything else. Since he knew it to be false in his heart, he considered himself a rebel. Still, it's always much easier not to fight it, so he went along, at least outwardly. He believes if you are self-aware, you can't accept it for long before you rebel and become yourself. (It's true of those who keep their spirit, but that's a toughie.) Paul admitted the conflict and challenges he went through in his life turned out to be a modifier of his behavior in a good sense, since they got him to rebel. Steven agreed that if you rise to challenge, it can strengthen you, and achieving something against great odds adds to your self-confidence.

While Steven was surrounded by an alternative culture outside the family in his teens, I wondered if Paul was aware of alternative viewpoints when he was young. He was not, into his late teens: until he was 16 years old he couldn't even watch TV shows, and the town was totally isolated. Now he's learned that

our attitudes are always a projection of our values, and that to live well was to bring the inside out, not simply take the outside in and try to make yourself into what it demands. If it's anything, sin is a kind of ignorance, so if first we work on learning truth, it positively modifies our values. He concluded that a good education would allow us to live an honest life—an idea once universally championed.

Deb added, when people are valued and allowed to pursue their thing, that can happen not just in a family. We can be that way for each other as well as ourselves.

Tim Leary used to say, "I'm tired of being should on." The internet was supposed to liberate us, and may have for a short stretch, but now we are afflicted by much more of an onslaught than even a church could lay on you. Social media insists we take stands on every whiff of scandal, and trumpet our opinions. Though mine was the minority position, I perceive it's actually harder these days to authentically be yourself, harder to become yourself, maybe because of the mirage of freedom; the soundbite of freedom. Peer pressure puts all other pressures to shame. Regardless of the exact degree of bondage, that is the main point of what we do in the Gurukula: seeking how you can become something that appears to be your authentic self, in a world that isn't mirroring it but working hard to manipulate us into something else. Computer claws have more deep access to our psyche than the local minister could dream of.

Steven often feels overwhelmed by the amount of information that is available now. Google is an incredible advancement, but there is only so much time in a day. Ultimately he comes back to emptying the mind in meditation. That's a good solution, yes, but I also see a lot of young people utterly addicted and dependent on their screens, and I wonder what meditation in a vacuum would do for them?

Andy spoke optimistically of the inner voice that is perennial and that's talking to them. He is confident that if he was headed down a wrong path, he would hear that voice speak up. Its

demands can be imperative. He told us of the time when he had just come back from his first trip to India, with no job, and his parents were trying to get him to stay near them in Minnesota (also Paul's state). He was on the verge of taking an apartment in Minnesota, and he developed insomnia, which continued for weeks. He realized he couldn't stay there. There was no specific reason why that was true, but he felt a powerful inner refusal. In response, he headed out West in a drive-away car, and that's why he's with us today.

Deb reported on her current book, *The Mask of Apollo*, by Mary Renault, about classical Greece. It features an actor whose inner voice comes from the mask. Apollo is a tutelary deity, an inner voice speaking to him, clearly a projection of his inner flow.

I stipulated that the true inner voice is essentially the voice of God, yet most of us either don't know it's there, or we've been taught not to listen to it. We lost it early on. People are taught that the word of God (or the word of authority) is written down and never changes, and our inner voice never matches it, so we have to relinquish it to escape from being sinners. It's a great technique for making people deaf to their own self-awareness.

Andy concurred that a lot of suffering comes from that.

Deb remembers Nitya teaching her about her inner voice. When she was 8 months pregnant with Emily, her first, she asked him "what am I going to do with this baby?" He didn't respond. She asked again. No response. She struggled and pondered, but she was forced to ask a third time: "what am I going to do with this baby?" Finally he looked at her, and said, "There will be an inner voice that will tell you what to do." And it did.

The story resonated with Jan, because she learned early on to do the same thing with how to handle her baby's cry: to listen within to what she sensed the baby wanted, and that seemed to be a way of developing her parenting skills, and to better love them.

Steven feels very fortunate to have been part of generation that embraced listening to our inner voice, and to resist

conditioning. Having taught at Berkeley, he's optimistic that the younger generations are as committed to social justice as we were.

The Berkeley kids are really driven, and we took a moment to note that that doesn't mean they are listening to their inner voice. Many of them are under tremendous pressure, and doing what they've been instructed to do, to succeed. Bill spoke in favor of having some un-stressed time before or after college to really listen to yourself. Doing so shaped us in a lot of ways. He himself kicked around for a while doing a lot of different things, and that gave him just the capability and freedom to develop his sense of self that he wouldn't have if he had started his career immediately.

The conversation naturally segued into the second vignette, about Nataraja Guru's definition of God, with its fabulous punchline. I'll clip in Nitya's closely-related short chapter on the Meaning of God, from Love and Blessings, in Part II.

Jan noted the resemblance of God as "what's right when we're wrong" is like the inner voice that Andy was talking about. It is, yet we have to be careful, because we often think we're right when we're not. As Deb put it, thinking we are right and actually being right are not always the same thing.

There are several ways to look at the koan, and it's impossible to derive a surefire formula from it. That's what makes it a koan.

Paul felt it must have to do with individual identification. When we think we are right and we are actually wrong, we are structuring the world from a separated individual stance. Only when we see God as part of everything can we be right. When we seek knowledge, we are trying to recover from separation, to find truth.

Moni said, when we make a decision, our knowledge might not be complete. When we think this is right or this is what I want, that might not be based on full knowledge of the whole situation. There is the real thing out there, but we are not seeing it all. That which is right when you are wrong, can be interpreted in this way. In even a simple opinion, we may not have full knowledge.

Steven noted that full knowledge is a high bar....

Paul spoke to that with words from Nitya (and the Chandogya Upanishad): how much of the ocean do you need to drink before you decide it is salty? If we divide the universe into measurable parts, and then try to put the parts back together into a whole, it's like a dog chasing his tail. (I guess that means fun, but pointless.)

That's right. Our inner voice, at its best, is the voice of "god." Those authentic feelings are your whole brain communicating its decided conviction. You know you have to follow that. Feeling and responding to the truth of it doesn't take a lot of specific knowledge; in fact, too much information is what makes it so hard to hear. We can let the inner genius pare down the input to the bare bones.

Paul continued, if you're thinking of yourself as having an agency that consists of an ego that is primarily invented by a mind that believes it is separate from God, then God becomes something on the outside. When you are wrong, God is something on the inside that is right.

I hazarded that our being wrong is reflected back to us by the mismatch with situation. We tend to suffer from being out of tune with our environment. If you find something isn't working, you begin to meditate on the unseen principle that represents rightness.

Our discussion reminded me of the right/left brain hemisphere picture of current neuroscience. The right half substantiates our beingness, our witness, our direct experiences. Its awareness feels like god-consciousness. The left side is always busy programming our lives and working with parts, and tends to forget its better half, which it could factor in, to its lasting benefit. Andy sent in a relevant line with his Gita responses of last week: heed non-engineered Awareness.

The left hemisphere deals with abstraction, which never feels quite as satisfying as our beingness. Our ferocious drives come, at least in part, from trying to attain those great feelings through processes that are innately unable to. So we push them harder and

harder. The disconnect is felt as disillusionment, even depression. We're trying to make something real out of our abstract imagination, and it just can't do it, on its own.

Steven wondered about morality: how do you know you are doing the right thing to another person? What exactly is conscience? Those who obtain absolute knowledge seem to be morally clear—saints or realized beings don't do bad things (at least the ones we admire).

Deb responded that the bigger picture is needed, one that takes in everything, not just personal desires, and Jan added that the values of the Absolute tend to show up when accessing the greater Self.

Narayana Guru (among many others) stated it simply, in Atmo 21-25: what's good for you must be good for everyone else, culminating in this:

what each performs for the happiness of the self  
should be conducive to the happiness of another.

What is good for one person and brings misery to another  
such actions are opposed to the self, remember!

Deb rhapsodized, if you really believe there isn't a division between people and the world, how can you do something that doesn't care for all parts of the Self or the Absolute?

Bill has noticed that people who are clear don't have stuff clouding their vision. There is a silent witness in all of us. Gurus live it all the time.

Andy admitted that truth is something you can grasp intellectually, but to live it takes a lot of courage. Courage is something we don't always bring to bear, but it's what your understanding is asking of you.

Our concluding thought about "that which is right when you are wrong is god," is we should cherish that innate rightness, when we intuit it, as divine. It is worthy of veneration.

## Part II

### Beware of False Labels

Nataraja Guru always liked to talk to his fellow passengers everywhere. He would accost them in trains, buses, planes and ships. Once an Indian university student asked him, “Sir, what do you think of family planning?”

“What do you mean by family planning?” Guru shot back.

“The government of India has a project to control the population of India by adopting some contraceptive methods.”

Guru commented dryly, “To ward off ants from a jar of sugar, if you label it ‘salt’ will an ant take any notice of it?”

The student was surprised. “Why do you think this is a case of wrong labeling?” he asked.

Guru began to expostulate. “A family is a sacred unit exemplifying the finest relations man can have, such as those of parent and child, husband and wife, and brothers and sisters. To plan a family one has to visualize the inner coherence of the whole unit, and should understand the contribution of each member to its general value structure. Each person has a right to unfold in their own way and to realize what is dear to them. Both the end one conceives and the means adopted to bring it about should directly or indirectly contribute to a similar unfoldment and realization of the values cherished by the other members of one’s family.

“Creating environments and facilities, and avoiding hindrances and obstructions are aspects which need planning. This is to be done from inside the family and not to be imposed by a government from outside. If the government is not doing its utmost to insure safe births and adequate nourishment for the children, an atmosphere free of prejudice and dread in which children can grow up, educational facilities, medical care and the inculcation of value visions, as well as environmental protection and adequate parental support, how dare it interfere with a family to inhibit the desire to



have children or prohibit the birth of a child?

“Does your government’s ‘family planning’ give attention to all this? It does not. They are only interested in producing a statistical report showing how many men are castrated and how many women’s ovaries are ripped open.”

The student was stunned. “How do we tackle overpopulation, then?”

Guru asked, “What do birds do when there is overpopulation?”

“They migrate.”

“Man can do the same thing.”

Guru then called the student’s attention to the area outside the train window. We were passing through miles and miles of good land and vegetation with hardly anyone living on it. He said, “In the crowded city of Bombay we want no proof of overpopulation. The same is true of Calcutta. But outside the city we hardly see any habitation. Proper planning should be done to provide facilities to people so they can live in natural surroundings, rather than sucking everyone into an industrial city and then insisting on their castration.”

## When You are Wrong

Once I was accompanying Nataraja Guru on the train from Delhi to Amritsar. Among our fellow passengers were two gentlemen who were workers of the Indian Communist Party in the Punjab area. Seeing our saffron robes and our beards they took us for religious people, and wanted to discuss some of the fundamentals affecting human life.

The older one asked the guru, “Sir, do you believe in God?”

Nataraja Guru replied, “I cannot answer that question unless you tell me what you understand by the term ‘God’. The existence or nonexistence of God is to be determined by its definition.”

The elderly gentleman pursued his point, “And what is Guruji’s definition of God?”

Nataraja Guru gave him a slight smile and a look and answered, “That which is right when you are wrong is God.”

## THE MEANING OF GOD (from L&B)

In the evening, Ken’s middle-aged Uncle Harold came with his girlfriend. Seeing us all in the silent mood of recluses, they joined us in looking into the beautiful garden, with its strange combination of effects of autumn, winter and untimely spring. Red leaves were falling and fluttering; the skeletons of the apple trees stood by as mere pencil sketches. Bellbirds made rhythmic chimes as if a worship was going on in the surrounding bush. The garden stretched far down into the valley, beyond which we could have a glimpse of the city fading out into what must have been the sky and the sea meeting at the smoky beaches of Melbourne.

Harold wanted to sit next to me in a huge chair, which was occupied by Socrates, a weird-looking cat belonging to Sheila. Harold tried to push it aside, but the cat resisted with not a little resentment and I had to pull up another chair for him. Everybody knew of the big pussy’s claim on me, and nobody sat in that chair even when it was out on a sparrow hunt.

Harold succeeded in drawing me into an animated dialogue. He asked, “Do you believe in God?”

“Do you believe in chuchi?” I returned.

“What did you say?”

“Do you believe in chuchi?”

“I don’t get it. What’s chuchi?”

“When I say ‘chuchi’ you don’t understand, and so you can’t say whether you believe in it or not,” I told him. “Similarly, ‘God’ is a sound that can be meaningful or meaningless according to the connotation one attributes to it. Moreover, the word ‘belief’ has some very bad associations with it. In the name of belief,

thousands of people were tortured and killed in medieval Europe. Jesus himself was crucified for what he believed. Galileo was persecuted for not believing in the assumed stationary nature of earth. So I have to be a little wary of the term belief. If by belief you mean understanding and accepting something, then of course I understand the term God in a very acceptable sense.

“At the same time, we must also note that the word is not connoted in everybody’s mind the same way. Some think of God in terms of an anthropomorphically conceived autocrat. Bearing such a notion in mind, Lucrates said that if lions and asses could hold brushes and write poems, they’d have described and painted their gods either with manes or long ears. Hence, God exists by definition. Only if you tell me clearly what you understand by God can I tell you whether I believe in it or not.”

Harold answered, “I’m not much of a believer. I think people refer to God as a supernatural power that controls the destiny of the world.”

“If you’re interested in the semantic meaning of God’s existence, I should ask you to refer to the Encyclopedia of Ethics and Religion,” I continued. “In the actual employment of the term God in our daily life, it is not always a noun. Sometimes it’s a verb, sometimes a conjunction, and sometimes it’s an interjection. Krishna, in the Bhagavad Gita, speaks of God as a conjunction.”

Harold looked a little confused. “You’re making it difficult for me. Could you explain that a little more clearly?”

“In the train at every window there’s a ledge on which is written ‘lock’. Lock in such an instance could be a noun until ten o’clock. After that it’s time for sleep, and then the same word becomes a verb. You lock the lock. Like that, the part of speech to which God belongs and what the word signifies can only be decided by looking at the context in which it is found.

“When a child asks his father where the earth has come from, the father may say ‘God’. Here, God is a blanket phrase meaning the generic source of all unknown causes.

“When a man is in the grip of a great fear and he cries out, ‘God!’ his appeal is not to the primary cause. He may see no possibility of getting out of the dreadful situation in which he is caught, and in his state of utter helplessness he hopes for a miracle to save him. In such a situation only a factor that is outside the span of cause and effect can be expected to help, so he cries out ‘God!’

“A woman struck by the beauty of a rainbow or a sunset may say ‘God,’ but she does not mean a primal cause or a miraculous benefactor with her exclamation. Her mind, exaggerating the glory of beauty, is suggesting the experience to be as divine as seeing God.

“So in our everyday life God is the word with the widest semantic range, covering vast areas of feeling, reasoning and willing. It would be foolish to reject such a useful term from our vocabulary. One would have to coin a number of new words supported by long and complicated definitions if one chose to avoid it.

“I’m not particularly charmed by the much used and abused word God. However we need something to indicate our belongingness to the whole, from the microcosm to the macrocosm and from the feeblest flicker of a smile to the all-embracing benevolence that keeps our soul cheerful and our thoughts bound to the integrity of Truth. That purpose is served by the most collective of collective terms, God.

“One last point. We know how much we depend on others as well as other existential factors. This is also true of our knowledge of consciousness, which is equally dependent on the miraculous core of existence which enables sentient beings to consciously and efficiently communicate with each other. The value that makes life happy and meaningful is an integral part of the complex structure where each being is interrelated with others. A little imagination is enough for us to realize how much we depend upon and participate in the total existence, subsistence and value, which, as an omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent Absolute, is called God.

“When a man recognizes this stable ground under his feet as his true existence, this omniscient consciousness as the fountain-source of his own thoughts and feelings, and this supreme value lending meaning to all that is desired and desirable, his communion with God becomes a true encounter that takes him far beyond the frontiers of logic. To him, God becomes an irresistible intimation. Until one has such a mystical experience, all that he says of God can at best be only a theoretical possibility, and has very little reference to what, with an overwhelming sense of fulfillment, the mystic calls God.”

I saw Harold sitting somewhat dazed, as if he was seeing an inner vision of exquisite beauty. All were silent, and our hearts were filled with a joy beyond words. I felt like a moonstone melting away in the moonlight. After a very long pause, Harold got up like a child coming out of Alice’s Wonderland and took my hands with great love. After Harold and his friend left, we all slipped back into our usual meditation, which we always experienced as our natural state. Perhaps it was a little after midnight when we unwillingly got up to say goodnight.

### Part III

Good to keep in mind: if you’re wrong and I’m right, it doesn’t make me God.

### Part IV

From Dips:

Families...and their way of dealing with kids, leaves a lot to be desired. I think in their ignorance and at times to discipline...most parents would like the command 'because I say so' to be strictly followed...unfortunately in my case too. It's not always about rules, a lot is about having general knowledge...the kids are picking up information from everywhere and unless parents have all the

answers which they don't most times kids are shunted off...for a lack of knowledge but without letting on that the parent in question has no idea.

Part III...is what we need to be careful about...the smugness of being right can lead us into false ego inflations!  
Nice dialectics on the meaning of 'God' from L & B.