

8/11/20

Tao Te Ching Class Notes, verse 30

A well spaced-out gathering in the yard marked a rare moment in Portland Gurukula history. (In the 60s, being spaced out meant you were really stoned—how times have changed!) Our last outside class meeting was at least five years ago, back when Anita still lived in the area and came in person. The small group of stalwarts—Moni, Karen, Susan, Jan, Deb and Scott, enjoyed the chirping of birds, roaring of semi-distant motorcycles, and the rapid plunging of temperatures. It takes quite a hot day to make outside classes feasible, as cool evenings are the norm here. Before long we were shivering for the Tao!

Our psyches eagerly sensed the presence of friends, inhaling who knows what electromagnetic and other information, adding a feeling of completion and satisfaction that Zoom can't provide in any somatic sense.

This is the first of four explicitly antiwar verses: 30, 31, 68, 69, and the message was utterly modern, in the sense that all belligerent parties these days haven't the slightest intimation that there is a way out of the madness they further enflame every day. A lot of time was spend pondering how rabid dogs could ever grasp such a sublime principle as unity, and in what form it would be communicable.

Lao Tzu's message is clear: Taoists don't advise using weapons to rule the land (P), that tactic backfires (LG). It's liable to violently rebound upon oneself (L, Mit, Min). If you are compelled to fight, finish it and be done with it. Never boast, brag or otherwise take it as an ego victory. If at all possible, win without force.

Charles sent a amusing short clip on this topic a while back, of kung fu movie star Bruce Lee, on The Art of Fighting Without

Fighting <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xNToJwKE4F0> .
You'll be happy if you include it with your reading.

The most eerie thing about the various translations is how utterly they are disregarded in the geopolitical maelstrom of the Anthropocene Era. It's as if every tenet is intentionally violated. The violations go well beyond anything Lao Tzu could have imagined. Some of the transgressors are even schooled in *The Art of War*, attributed to Sun Tzu, which is still studied in military institutes; it is contemporary with the *Tao Te Ching* and even borrows ideas from it. But realpolitik dares not heed its warnings, the threats and fears are too intense. That's why, I'm afraid, we wind up blasting civilization back to the Stone Age on a regular basis, and one of these times it will be Game Over, since the weaponry ever spirals upward in lethality.

Waley (in Minford) quotes Sun Tzu: "Without a full understanding of the Harm caused by War, it is impossible to understand the most profitable way of conducting it." Ain't that the truth! Maybe we should hold a group viewing for the class of *Dr. Strangelove* one of these days....

Mostly we read out excerpts from the sages and reveled in the joys of companionship. It's easier to have a serious discussion in closer quarters, but we did okay. Deb started us off by quite rightly reminding us we can and should take this advice personally, away from the war context. There's a general tenet or advice here that you go just far enough with your thrust and then step back. You are being carried with the natural momentum —if you have your own desires in the flow, it's important that you stop the minute they are accomplished. Anything more is ego building.

Feeling deeply how relevant the advice is, Karen wanted to know the time period, which is roughly 500 BCE, when a surge of brilliant sages appeared on the planet, as we've noted before. Deb's major was Chinese history, and she told us about the warring kingdoms: small states raiding their neighbors, substantial

chaos and brutal hierarchies of power in each one. Often the ruler would employ a sage like Confucius for guidance, which may be why we have records of their words. Karen wondered aloud if anything had changed in all that time. Yes, it has. Rulers no longer consult wise people.

Moni noted that the philosophy came from China but they are not following any of this. She's right, the authoritarian fist is coming down harder there than even here, at least according to our media. It looks like the globalization experiment is being killed off across the globe. The US is already an isolated island of insanity and inanity. If you have a Twitter account, you can probably get this from Michael Moore:

<https://twitter.com/MMFlint/status/1293251479680278528> . Only 8 countries will now let Americans in without any restrictions: North Macedonia. Kosovo. Tunisia. Turkey. Dominican Republic. Mexico. Maldives. Serbia. A respondent reports that the Dominican Republic hotel he had booked told him not to come.

Charles has some thoughts on this kind of communications fiasco from our Gita class that he graciously allowed me to add here, and you can read it in Part II. He's using Heracles' Augean Stables Labor as a symbol of our intelligence being choked on bullshit. Actually, the Heracles myths predate the wisdom influx of 500 BCE by at least a few hundred years. Maybe when we actually put the ancient insights to work for us, we can add some new ways of thinking, but we haven't even come close yet, in nearly 3000 years.

As we thought about in the last class, the urge to control is what does us in. Everybody thinks they know what will fix the Stables, and it just mucks things up more, in the same old way. Nitya's final pronouncements in *Meditations on the Way* are eloquent on this—don't miss them in Part II.

Mitchell has a line in his translation that *the universe is forever out of control*, and he explains in his end note that he

means it is “out of control of his own, tiny, personal, conscious self.” Therefore the Master lets all issues resolve themselves.

Red Pine as always, adds some pithy quotes from the sages. Mencius has the best, reminding me of so many of our esteemed pundits: “Those who say they are great tacticians or great warriors are, in fact, great criminals.” Lao Tzu himself says: “Tyrants never choose their death,” a variant of “those who live by the sword die by the sword.”

Though we’re forever preaching solely to the choir, I read out a section I’ve shared in other venues, from *Humankind: A Hopeful History*, by Rutger Bregman, on the efficacy of nonviolence in the present day. He talks about Nelson Mandela’s journey from armed rebellion to nonviolence, which ultimately carried the day in South Africa:

As the years passed, Mandela began to realise what scientists would later show: nonviolent resistance is a lot more effective than violence. Take the recent work of Erica Chenoweth, an American sociologist who started out believing the ‘Mandela Method’ was naive. In the real world, she thought, power is exercised through the barrel of a gun. To prove it, she created a huge database of resistance movements going back to 1900.

‘Then I ran the numbers,’ she wrote in 2014. ‘I was shocked.’ More than 50 percent of the nonviolent campaigns were successful, as opposed to 26 per cent of the militant ones. The primary reason, Chenoweth established, is that more people join nonviolent campaigns. On average over *eleven times* more. And not just guys with too much testosterone, but also women and children, the elderly and people with disabilities. Regimes just aren’t equipped to withstand such multitudes. That’s how good overpowers evil—by outnumbering it. (359)

Deb reiterated Lao Tzu's vision of going with the natural impetus of the situation, while restraining the ego. She also brought an intriguing thought from Nancy R from a walk they took earlier: change isn't going to come from our little brains but from the earth rising up in us.

How do we practice this, in a world thoroughly instructed to force every issue? Especially the people doing the shooting and killing — how to get through to them? The Taoist method is to make the change in ourselves, since we are helpless anywhere else. Nitya's observations below describe how and how often this succeeds.

Jan lamented that what we are seeing now, the manipulation of truth, is another example of violence, of forcing your agenda on the situation. It's so sad to see it over and over again.

Deb could see that the verse is saying we're all in that situation and it's easy to react with anger and violence, and when we do we are pulled out of the Tao. For us to hear what's truly happening, we have to listen to the earth speaking to us. Otherwise we are never going to change how we react.

She continued that this philosophy affects more than we realize. She admitted when she's been angry, she's noticed that the situation changes in a negative way, and if she can alter that by not getting so upset, it in itself has a way of changing the dynamic for the better.

Musing on the violence that has marred the largely peaceful protests in the US over police state tactics, Karen said how wonderful it would have been if 1000 people showed up and just stood there in silence. Which in fact has happened often. We also gave credit to Portland's Naked Athena. Though the story went viral, our local paper did a typically stupid but handy column on it: <https://www.oregonlive.com/portland/2020/07/the-story-behind-the-surreal-photos-of-portland-protester-naked-athena.html> . It's another way of fighting without fighting. Most eloquent.

It's plain to anyone with a functioning neurology that the violent response to the Storm Troopers sent here to inflame the situation, minor though it was, was used as propaganda and as an excuse to ramp up the repressive efforts. Nitya talks about double gain and double loss, a common thread of Nataraja Guru's thinking, and this is a perfect example. Violence invites violence; peace invites peace. And this is how we have our impact: by being peaceful. It won't make the news. It will be tiny, even invisible, but it is far from nothing. Or better, is it allied with the Nothing that permits everything to exist?

Deb talked about bearing witness, how that is doing something other than being hurtful. She reprised the recent story of a woman in Central Park, New York, who called the police about a Black bird watcher:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/06/nyregion/amy-cooper-false-report-charge.html> . She was eventually charged with a criminal offense, but the victim didn't want to press charges. He knew the woman had learned a lesson, and continuing to harass her would make her bitter and more negative, reinforcing her defensive posture, where clemency would be a welcome gesture and invite her to change her ways.

In summary, this is about unity. Let things take their course. Don't pursue your advantage once the game is won. Be kind.

Jan added that we're very lucky in Oregon to have nature around us. Sacred space to retreat to. We were in one as she spoke, in fact, and our sympathies were transmitted to the millions and millions of fellow human beings who are shut up indoors in huge buildings with little open space anywhere near. We do indeed have it easier here, thanks to the space around, and the positive attitudes of our fellow citizens.

This week's Chuang Tzu story is The Fighting Cock, on page 109: <https://terebess.hu/zen/mesterek/MertonChuangTzu.pdf> . Too perfect.

A few moments of silence and we rose to leave, smiles and good cheer on every countenance.

Part II

Beverley's haiku:

I was reading Guru Nitya's comments with his class on verse 30 of Meditations on the Way, and I came across a mention of the well-known koan, "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" My haiku for verse 30 uses Nitya's suggestion that this is a metaphor for a pacifist attitude to life; both for rulers of the country and for individuals in their daily life. Think of the cries of pain, sorrow and loss, and sound of weapons of destruction in a war, and the angry shouting of individuals in dispute or protesting crowds – all of which tend to lead to destruction.

30

"One hand clapping," means
no sound of dispute. It takes
two to cause conflict.

This is like the Tao,
quiet and peaceful, with no
noisy upheavals.

* * *

Here is Guru Nitya's last entry in *Meditations on the Way*. Likely he flew off to Moscow or Fiji or Belgium for his next adventure; he was being invited all over the world in those days.

I'm familiar with a number of political and religious institutions where there is a central figure who is the "ruler of the empire." That person's political ideology or spiritual ideology is the law, or at least the guideline for the "empire." There are usually enthusiastic adherents around the ruler. Their intentions may be good. They want their chosen ideology to become more popular, and in this way their "empire" will expand, presumably to the benefit of more people.

I have seen situations where one very aggressive person shows such loyalty that the ruler becomes indebted to him. He gets the ruler to think that there is a great insecurity, and that protective measures must be taken. Thus the aggressive advisor has the opportunity to create an army. With his privilege of labeling others as enemies of the empire, he blackmails both the so-called outsiders, who become more and more hostile, and also, through manipulation, the ruler himself. Soon nobody who ever visits the place appreciates the empire anymore, and it perishes. I have seen this both on political fronts and in many spiritual institutions.

How can such a ruler and such an empire be saved?

In addition to the appropriate verse Vinaya cited [which are from Narayana Guru's *Atmopadesa Satakam*, 22 and 25:

The happiness of another—that is my happiness;
one's own joy is another's joy—this is the guiding principle;
that action which is good for one person
should bring happiness to another.

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

those who give great grief to another
will fall into the fiery sea of hell and burn.]

there is another verse of Narayana Guru, 46:

By fighting it is impossible to win;
by fighting one another no faith is destroyed;
one who argues against another's faith, not recognizing this,
fights in vain and perishes; this should be understood.

which says to vanquish by fighting is not possible. By fighting one cannot win. One only wastes one's time. Personally, whenever I have been put into similar situations in the past, I thought the best I could do was meditate on listening to the sound of the clap of one hand. If you don't resist or retaliate, the clap is only of a single hand. I would think, "It's better if I simply allow the wind and the clouds to pass." I knew an end would come—if not in two days, then in two years or twenty years. What is the hurry?

On more than one occasion I have experienced this intimidation from a person or who wanted to assist the ruler by "a show of arms." In all cases the main result of the show of arms was the creation of ill will all around.

Nataraja Guru gave a warning that disadoption brings double loss (as seen in the provocation of anger and annoyance, etc.), whereas mutual adoption brings double gain. I always keep this in mind. Of course, you can't stop another from severing from you. That's unfortunate. But you can avoid pouring oil on the fire. Instead, allow it to cool.

Often when injustice and untruth look victorious, you may lose heart and lose your balance also. In such dire hours some even join with the forces of injustice. But my Guru always used to insist on the verity of the old Sanskrit dictum, *satyam eva jayate na anritam*, which proclaims "Truth alone ultimately prevails, and not

falsehood.” You should believe this even in the midst of darkness and confusion. It necessitates a belief not only in your own intelligence, calculations, judgments and conclusions, but also in God.

God may sometimes look very feeble, but finally He will always become victorious. Regarding this, my Guru used to observe to me, “Nitya, you are seven parts intelligence and three parts devotion.” Thus even during the many times when I looked around and my reason told me, “This won’t work,” I had to admit, “I believe in my Guru, I believe in God.” And it is so amazing to see that, just as this passage says, it does rebound. Those who perpetuate falsehood and injustice eventually meet their doom. I can write down hundreds of instances in which this was the case. It’s miraculous.

The lesson is that you should not become panicky. You can sit back. I have found that, in spite of the temptation, it’s better if I don’t argue, even with my biggest detractor. In spite of his ill will, I would make my mind as passive as possible, and then sincerely pray for him and his understanding and wellbeing. This is no sorcery. Once the disciple Peter approached Jesus and asked, “It is said that seven times a person is to excuse the transgressions of another. Can that be right?” Jesus replied, “No—seventy *times* seven times.”

You should never retaliate or seek revenge. The negative fight you put up or the vengeance you seek is the denominator factor, but on the numerator side there is a negative force. Not negativity in the sense of darkness, but rather passivity or neutrality.

This is hard to practice, but when from within the vision of oneness comes, it is most natural. You don’t any longer feel that anger. From 1968 to 1973 my mind was filled twenty-four hours a day with the works in which I was engaged, such as my commentary on the Bhagavad Gita and my *Meditations on the Self*.

I had not time for anything else. All my hours were soaked in it. Some of those here, such as Peter, were witnesses to what I am saying, and others to what I am about to say.

At this exact same time a group of people was continuously engaged in trying to blackmail and intimidate me. When this was brought to my attention, I thought, “Oh my dear God, life is so full of beauty and meaning! I wish these unhappy people could have at least one peep into the wonder in which we are absorbed hour after hour. Then they would not need to waste their time. They could be happy too.” I had no thought of revenge. Eventually the dark clouds vanished. I marveled, “Who blew them away?” Certainly I cannot say it was I. Then I remembered the words of my Guru, “Truth alone prevails and not falsehood.”

If you know what your “campaign” truly is, it is the same as God’s campaign: that truth should prevail over untruth, love is to prevail over hatred, and knowledge should prevail over ignorance. This campaign has been going on a long time. It will not finally conclude tonight. It has its own natural pace and rhythm. If you are sensitive to this, you will be like a member of a great symphony orchestra, where each musician patiently and alertly awaits the moment of their contribution. The conductor will bring it to a close. You participate in it, and naturally it will come to its own conclusion. You need not push it. Don’t push the river.

Really, you have nothing to boast of. You cannot by yourself do a thing. Only if you can do, can you brag. Instead of boasting and bragging, you can come to know what Grace is—how it comes to you, guides you, and takes your life into it.

The reverence you have for the Way, this Great Truth which you adore, and your desire to see this Great Tradition go on, require your utmost service and loyalty. Things conclude in their own time. That choice is not yours.

Note by Scott – The hostile group Nitya refers to was a faction of the Western disciples of Nataraja Guru, who considered themselves his true heirs and sought to drive Nitya from his legitimate succession as Guru of the Narayana Gurukula, which he assumed after Nataraja Guru's death on March 19, 1973. One allied with them was even in attendance in the class, and this might have prompted Nitya's veiled comment.

In a letter to Peter O, on Dec. 7, 1973, Nitya wrote an example of what he outlined above:

Overriding my rights the Curran-Patrick-Freddy group printed 5,000 copies of [Nataraja Guru's] Gita with the hope that I will see them in a court of law. I found the Gita teaching of treating profit and loss the same as a better answer to their challenge. Instead of calling in the lawyers, I am offering a special prayer for the easy sale of the books.

* * *

Charles is in my Gita 2020 class, and his latest response to one of the prompts for chapter V is well aligned with a thread from this class. He's referring to my exegesis of Heracles V, the Labor of the Augean Stables, which can be found here: <https://nitya-teachings.weebly.com/herculesheracles.html> .

Speaking of mountainous piles of bullshit to confound citizens, here's an "amusing" Op/Ed listing absurd recent claims by *President Trump:
https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/08/10/i-still-believe-president-president/?utm_campaign=wp_post_most&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&wpisrc=nl_most

Charles' Gita response:

Charles

What does the term PUNDIT mean to you?

A pundit to me is not a mere expert or windbag intellectual. A pundit is one deeply established in poetic lore .In the figure of the dry well covered up with sand blown for centuries which nevertheless at bottom still contains the precious water of ancient wisdom,that means deep ancient wisdom covered by centuries of civilizational ratiocination,the true pundit is one learned in languages who can get through all the accumulated sand to deep water.

As an example,from my own experience,I give you Robert Graves,a 20th century poet who was the author of Greek Myths.With reference to the Labors of Hercules in volume 2 of Greek Myths.

Graves was born under the sign of the Lion in the zodiac,which is where the sun is now,halfway between solstice and equinox. Hercules as we now know him is a cubist mosaic of thousands of fragments of solar mythology from many cultures over all of human history back to time immemorial.

The relevance of Hercules in the context of these wonderful verses is partly that Scott has written an essay on the twelve labors of Hercules which is enough to qualify him for a modest place in the great hierarchy of pundits.

Aristotle,a pundit himself,asked his student Alexander the Great ,who was setting out with an army to conquer the East,to bring along with him a certain number of learned observers,what we might call the first anthropologists,to study the geography and cultures of those eastern lands,which the young general out of respect for his teacher agreed to do.

These anthropologists reported that the people beyond the Indus

River worshipped Hercules and Dionysus, calling Hercules by the name of Krishna and Dionysus by the name of Shiva. This was a time earlier than the Bhagavad Gita and long before the blue flute playing god of cowherds became associated with Krishna. So way back when, Krishna was a solar hero, the Indian Hercules.

* * *

Hercules, continued

As I mentioned, Hercules as we know him now is a cubist mosaic of mythological times and places which can be seen from millions of perspectives, but not all at once. One must pick and choose. I want to speak of Hercules' fifth labor with reference to verse 19 of the present assignment.

But first, with reference to verse 15, the question of Hercules moral character as reported in the old Myths. I think nobody can present Hercules to the young impressionable minds as a role model. Plato himself would have banished the Myths and the poets who make up and perpetuate these disreputable stories from his ideal Republic. Because, reasoned Socrates, God is Good-right? GOD is THE GOOD, the Absolute as Good. Whereas, Hercules, who is the Sun, and therefore God in the allegory, is reported by those rascally poets to have engaged in all sorts of crimes and non virtuous activities. Not the sort of things young children or most adults should be hearing about.

verse 15 says, The all-pervading One takes cognizance neither of the sinful nor of the meritorious actions of anyone; wisdom is Veiled by unwisdom; beings are deluded thereby.

The all-pervading One being the sun, Hercules himself is that same sun on a lower rung of the ladder, shall we say. There is a scale of

values,an axiology to be used in the interpretation of myth,which extends from the ridiculous to the sublime .On the side of ridiculousness,Hercules has always been popular as the circus strong man.He is the one who comes wearing the lion skin.higher up the ladder from the buffoonish muscleman who comes wearing the trademark lion skin ,Celestial Hercules is the Lion of the zodiac.one who comes wearing the skin of a Lion.

Above that,is Samson,the biblical Hercules,who is an allegory of Christ.

Even further up the ladder are godlike historical figures such as Giordano Bruno ,he who brought metaphysical heliocentricity as complementary to the heliocentric physics of Copernicus.and who was burned at the stake by the inquisition .As history at certain moments takes on the lineaments of myth,so the burning of Bruno recapitulated the death of Hercules,burnt alive on his own funeral pyre and apotheosized!

At the top of the axiological ladder is the Supreme Sun who shines impartially on the wicked and the righteous,on the wise and the foolish.

Written by Marshall McLuhan in 1948:

“The human person who thinks,works,or dreams himself into the role of a machine is as funny an object as the world provides.And,in fact,he can only be freed from this trap by the detaching power of wild laughter.Finnegans Wake by James Joyce especially being a great intellectual effort aimed at rinsing the Augean Stables of speech and society with geysers of laughter.”

The Mechanical Bride,pp 100-101

I was thinking of the 5th Labor.We are buried in bullshit.Becoming more confused which dubious information and misinformation.

I was thinking of verse 19. “Creativity..”complication,fake news.

Heracles is insight .

On the individual level,nearly buried in mental garbage from media.

Bullshit.

I haven't got it in focus.

Hordes of people can't pay the rent,no way to put food on the table,

riot.

Crowds of distressed people on the screen.Looks scary.

they are being set up.Cyborg troopers waiting in the wings.for an emergency.The public bewildered.buried in bullshit.

Individual heros can't do much.for this systemic diminution of understanding.Its not like Lexington and concord.

Thinking not the solution.Ferlinghetti.Another flood is coming but not the kind you think.

But the key phrase,Augean Stables of speech and society ...states the problem at least.speech,including the extensions and amplifications,protolanguage and metalanguage.

A rabelaisian approach to verse 19:

Rabelasian means displaying earthy humor,bawdy

Turning attention to Scott's commentary on verse 19,third paragraph .

Sargasso...Scott comments

"Its root meaning is to excrete.Later on,it took the sense of a stampede of animals bursting from a pen..."

The pen suggests media of communication.The stampede of animals bursting from a pen suggests the media of communication clogged with an exuberance of mental excrement.The plain word ,understood by everybody,is bullshit.

Bullshit,vulgar slang.As a noun it means stupid or untrue talk or writing;nonsense;as a verb to talk nonsense to someone(to bullshit

them), typically to be misleading or deceptive.

A more refined synonym, MENDACITY, means untruthfulness, lying, dishonesty, deceit, deception

I smell a powerful and obnoxious odor of mendacity. Aint no smell more powerful than the odor of mendacity!

Scott continues,

“Later still, and probably a much more humorous analogy, it came to mean creation, or creative urges.”

We might say that at this stage there begins to be a difficulty distinguishing between genuine creativity and bullshit.

This implies that what we are to curb and conquer are the excretions that burst from us.”

The 5th Labor of Hercules, the cleaning of the Augean Stables, can be viewed as an analogy.

[Room for one last]

Wrangler Feedyard, Texas, US - YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oEfbk3QbBMo>

The Greek Myth goes like this. Hercules in a fit of madness killed his children. The Oracle of Apollo at Delphi decreed that Hercules had to serve King Eurystheus, a man much inferior to himself for twelve years.

For the fifth labor, Hercules had to cleanse King Augeus' filthy cattle yard in one day.

Augeus was the greatest cattle baron in Greece at that time. The pileup of bullshit in these stables was beyond belief. Eurystheus intended to humiliate Hercules. He imagined Hercules having to load this bullshit into baskets and carry it away. This is an important point. This was a piecemeal step by step approach which represents the intellectual progression to enlightenment by stages.

Hercules was god incarnate. He acted spontaneously as the

embodiment of creative intuition and diverted the River Alpheus through the Stables, with a great gush cleansing them of the vast accumulations of tamasic creative (sargha)bullshit,all in one day in one day,which ,in the allegory represents instantaneous total enlightenment.

Scott: Charles, you're spot on about pundits. It's sad the word means the opposite nowadays as what you've said. What you've written qualifies for the gratitude everyone is passing along to each other, of the benefits of bringing our group consciousness to bear.

You've probably stretched the definition of pundit too far by including Mr. T as even a modest example, but that's another idea that makes you unique.... Very sweet of you.

So Krishna is the Indian Heracles! No wonder I was directed to stumble upon him.

You may not recall, but in the intro to my series on Heracles, I conclude with examples of the modern perspective, which you posit was Plato's as well. (Before that are examples of the respect according him in earlier ages.) The last is:

Here is one more example of how the ancient pearls have been trampled in the mud of the Age of Hubris. Bestselling author of all time, Agatha Christie, in *The Labors of Hercules* (NY: Dell, 1968, p. 9), ridicules the romantic attraction to the classics that prevailed in the West not too long ago. At the behest of a priggish academic type enamored of the age-old romances, ace detective Hercule Poirot—himself named after Hercules—is perusing the Greek myths and thinks:

Take this Hercules—this hero! Hero indeed? What was he but a large muscular creature of low intelligence and criminal tendencies!... This ancient Hercules probably suffered from

grand mal. No, Poirot shook his head, if *that* was the Greeks' idea of a hero, then measured by modern standards it certainly would not do. The whole classical pattern shocked him. These gods and goddesses—they seemed to have as many different aliases as a modern criminal. Indeed they seemed to be definitely criminal types. Drink, debauchery, incest, rape, loot, homicide and chicanery—enough to keep a *juge d'Instruction* constantly busy. No decent family life. No order, no method. Even in their crimes, no order or method!

“Hercules indeed!” said Hercule Poirot, rising to his feet, disillusioned.

It makes me wonder if Christie might even have drawn this from Plato....

Right also about the fifth Labor. Sometimes I wish the myths weren't so accurate about the follies of humankind.

Anyway, all that bullshit is precisely why the Gita's first order of business is to teach well-founded reason. Without that, you aren't going to get anywhere worthwhile.

Part III

Once again the Synchronicity Angel dropped by. I eased into the hammock this afternoon for a well-deserved reading session, cradling Tom Robbins' *Skinny Legs and All*, which I haven't gotten back to since it first came out in 1990. It's a fantastic, exuberant book with one main thread skewering many false conceits of modern-day Christianity.

Remember, I started the Notes with us properly spaced out for social distance, and referred to the old slang term of the same shape. Here Dirty Sock, Spoon and Can o' Beans have just finished their first long day walking to Jerusalem:

“Damn, good buddies!” said Dirty Sock. “This locomotin’ is neat. But I tell ya, I’m feeling pretty spaced out.”

“Pardon me for saying so, Mr. Sock,” Can o’ Beans counseled, “but you really ought not to use that slang.”

The stocking was stung. “What’s the damn matter with it?” he asked.

“Well,” said Can o’ Beans, a bit hesitantly, “imprecise speech is one of the major causes of mental illness in human beings.”

“Huh?”

“Quite so. The inability to correctly perceive reality is often responsible for humans’ insane behavior. And every time they substitute an all-purpose, sloppy slang word for the words that would accurately describe an emotion or a situation, it lowers their reality orientations, pushes them farther from shore, out onto the foggy waters of alienation and confusion.” (63-4)