

2/19/13
Verse 10

“Who is sitting in the dark? Speak, you!”
In this manner one speaks; having heard this, you also
to know, ask him, “And who are you?”
To this as well, the response is one.

Free translation:

Someone sitting in the dark asks another, “Who are you?” and the
other out of curiosity asks in return, “And who are you?” The
answer coming from both will be the same—”it is I.”

Nataraja Guru’s:

‘Who sits there in the dark? Declare!’ says one;
Whereupon another, himself intent to find, in turn
Asks, hearing the first: ‘who may you even be?’
For both the word of response is but One.

The intensity of verses 8 and 9 separated the curious from the
serious, and a more compact class is now poised for a yogic foray
into the depths of the psyche. Having distinguished a
contemplative truth seeker sitting alert and unattached beneath the
profusion of manifestation and suggesting that is our ideal role to
avoid hellish entanglements, Narayana Guru next moves us right
into the center of our contemplative consciousness for a practical
experiment. With eyes closed to minimize distractions, we are to
imagine two people sitting together and trying to communicate. It
turns out that they describe themselves identically. Are they really
two, or one?

Nitya says, “We are asked to imagine a situation where we
can reduce the input of all our sensory data to just the voice that we
hear. Touch, smell, taste and sight are to be removed from our

mind.” I like to take this a step beyond Nitya and Nataraja Guru’s interpretation, in that even hearing is annulled. Since this is an experiment performed in the imagination, there isn’t any sound, either: the words communicated are simply thoughts. Regardless, we arrive at the same state of awareness, in which everything is subdued except the certitude of existence. That is the unifying factor in the midst of multiplicity.

Our core of unity is fragmented by the torrent of sensory input we process day in and day out, in which our job is to carefully and accurately distinguish one item from another and assess its value to us. Contemplation means taking a vacation from the busyness. As processors of data we are shaped by our environment, but when grounded in our self we can begin to evolve spiritually. Oneness has to be realized, and that is the point of the experiment. If we take it as just another divergent factor, it isn’t really oneness at all: it’s a false concept.

Deb just sent me a relevant quote from one of Nitya’s letters to her, dated Sept. 1971: “The main vocation of the social animal called man is inventing lies and structuring them into invulnerable systems, and his hobby is pretending to seek Truth.” Ah, pretence! A whole verse (14) awaits us on it.

To the Vedantin the only certitude is that “I exist.” That’s the key point of the whole game. I exist, and this other person claims that they exist. That means we exist. Even though this *we* is a projection, I accept it because I know I exist. I will not find my assurance out there somewhere in all the many items; I have to turn inward and locate the core certitude of my own irrefutable existence. From there I can project it on everything else that warrants it.

The intuition of the rishis has been scientifically confirmed in our lifetime: the variegated world we perceive is actually a single production displayed in our imagination. Out of several billion bits of information bathing us every second, our clever brain selects a couple of hundred (about one ten millionth of one percent) and fleshes them out with presumptions and projections. It is so good at

the job that we become utterly mesmerized by the show, and come to believe it is dictating our life. We choose our path in response to what appears before us. But we are going to learn how to come unfrozen and take active part in guiding our destiny. Nitya already supplies a foreshadowing of how this can happen in his commentary:

On one hand, our identity in consciousness can have the liberating effect of seeing oneself in all. Knowing the witnessing consciousness as the same in all beings is an enlightening experience. But when we are obsessed with the circumscription of what is “mine,” we are heading for trouble. That attachment brings all the bondages which are described in the previous verse as the twofold creeper of external and internal ramifications. Externally it may lead you to many actions which are not warranted, bringing unnecessary complications and even misery; internally it may lead to delusory fantasies and fearful thoughts, which can cause confusion or great unhappiness.

The Guru has now brought us to the very core of our consciousness, which can spread out in all dimensions and include everything in itself. We can see the whole of experience as an experience of total awareness, or we can have a highly colored experience of ‘I’ consciousness, afflicted and affected, with all the seeming variegations of conceptual knowledge produced by perceptual data. We should go back again and again to the pure witnessing consciousness, so that we can both remain undeluded by the superficial turmoil of manifestation and at the same time be completely available to participate in the necessary aspect of life.

Ay, there’s the rub! We are trapped in a world of our own making, and instead of chafing and correcting the constrictive situation we have knuckled under to “our fate.” Deb gave us her current favorite quote from Carl Jung: “Until you make the unconscious conscious,

it will direct your life and you will call it fate.” The Gurus are going to instruct us how to move the walls of our self-imposed prison back farther and farther, until we embrace the All. That should make a great deal possible that is currently unimaginable. In simple terms we are making our unconscious conscious.

The one magical manifestation called “world” contains an infinite number of pieces. Taken one at a time, the pieces are more or less meaningless. Only in relation to the whole do they have significance. Narayana Guru’s thought experiment is designed to lodge us right in the heart of meaningfulness.

The ancient rishis deconstructed the world to reveal the uncertainty in our relation to it, and for over a hundred years, since Einstein’s Theory of Relativity in 1905, science has attempted to follow suit. The apparent reality of the world is quite compelling, however, and so without initiating an active scrutiny we quickly become complacent about it. That’s Maya’s great triumph: to coerce us to build a rude hut, move in and stay there. The Gurus are suggesting there is much more to life if we decide the hut is inadequate and start looking for the door.

Bobby led us into an exploration of an important corollary: that we construct a narrative of our life and then shrink ourselves down to fit into it. He has friends who say they want to change but they never do, and since he’s a helping type person he finds that frustrating. His friends don’t change because there is a disconnect between their narrative concepts and the actual structure of their thinking. We are much more trapped than we realize.

Bobby’s a young man, and some of us have already seen how the idealism and optimism of early adulthood gets warped into bitter disillusionment and self-defeating attitudes of many stripes as we age. There’s a trapping vine for you! It seems a shocking and avoidable tragedy. Something like this motivated Narayana Guru to offer what he could to those around him, and hopefully Bobby and others like him will have their chance to do the same. First we have to erect a healthy philosophy on the ruins of the unhealthy one we are intent on breaking out of. The stasis we see in our

friends can be a helpful mirror to analyze how we too are stuck. That's another important narrative we can adopt: rather than reject the follies we observe on all sides, we should use them as mirrors to analyze our own follies so we can extricate ourselves from them. We might even discover that the "folly" resides as much in our perception as it does in any person "out there."

This narrative issue strikes me as the most salient implication of the verse. Narayana Guru is carefully constructing a solid, expansive philosophical framework that we can substitute for our impoverished one. But he insists we make it our own and don't simply take it for show, as in "Now I'm a believer in the great Narayana Guru and all he represents." We can put up a picture of him and call it good, but then we don't get anywhere. Partly because our habits are deeply ingrained, and partly because it's good exercise, he demands a sincere participation from us. This too is very important: many who seek help from a teacher are simply exercising their selfishness in a devious fashion. A guru has to weed out those who are merely takers from those who are sincerely motivated to learn and grow.

There is great benefit to be gained from upgrading our narrative, and it is relatively easy to do. Above and beyond that, however, is to break free of all narrative contexts to experience true freedom. As we proceed, the ideas shared may be used as tools to pry ourselves free of all our conditioned modes of thought. As we have noted before, we can't just stop thinking and be free, because we are already bound by rigid systems of thought. We have to first recognize them and defang them. But to a degree, all relative descriptions are limiting, stultifying.

Susan gave an example of her work upgrading her narrative while driving. She gets easily angered by other drivers doing stupid things (a seemingly universal American quality). Yesterday she got smug and upset by someone, but caught herself in the act. She then substituted a more sympathetic image of being the other person, and her anger and much of her smugness vanished into empty space. With practice, such a new narrative will become

habitual, so instead of getting upset she will either remain unruffled or even be amused. How many opportunities like that does every day provide? Our class “homework” such as it is, is to reframe every event in a more liberating manner.

Michael had a similar experience at work the other day, when he was given a hard time by a coworker. In the past he would have taken it personally and gotten hurt, but he was able to stay detached and examine the context. He realized it wasn't about him, it was the other person's issue, so it was fairly easy to keep his cool. On top of that, he felt good about himself for avoiding the potential pitfall. Nothing wrong with letting the reward system kick in to support our wiser choices, so long as we don't overdo it.

Blaming seems to be a major narrative structure of the modern world. We could easily substitute “looking beneath the surface to find out the real motivation” as a much healthier alternative. Our kneejerk reaction is to automatically blame or fear being blamed, but we can catch ourselves in the act and upgrade it immediately.

Several in the class thought that people actively choose their stuck positions, but I disagree. Most of it is laid down before we are old enough to harbor doubts, which is why change is so difficult. Our mindset is lodged very far below the surface. We don't choose it, but we do accept it. We go along with it. What we do do is buy into what has been laid on us, and then reinforce and defend it. We seek out those whose blinders match our own, since then it seems we can ignore our afflictions. And that is the fulcrum where we can begin to lever change if we are savvy enough. Instead of bolstering our position—which is the subtext of much piousness and social exclusivity—we have to see how we are painfully bound by our mental orientation, and be aware that there are alternatives.

Nitya often referred to the ego boundary, and how it can be shrunk or enlarged. Why do we opt for a smaller self than a larger one? It's a mystery. The journey to inclusion is a fine narrative to base our life on, but it only works when it is clear-headed and not

just a baseless cliché. The narrative of destroying the ego, by the way, is severely flawed and should be discarded. Replace it with: a balanced ego is an essential part of a healthy mind. Nitya foreshadows the work we'll be doing in this area when he says:

We are now seeing the witnessing self a little more closely. We need to also be looking at how it can become afflicted and non-afflicted. When the child says "I feel pain in my ear," the mother doesn't have the pain but she has the idea, "this is my child." My body, my hand, my eyes, my mind, my child—in each case the "my" becomes the center of a circle of awareness. What is inside the circle is of special importance to us because it is "ours," and what falls outside the circle becomes "the other." Thus we separate I and the other, mine and not mine, me and not me. This is purely arbitrary. You can contract or expand the circle; you can include or exclude anyone. When you include it is called love, and when you exclude it is not-love. Hatred is another kind of inclusion, as in "my enemy."

We're not quite ready to begin consciously expanding the circle of our being under the tutelage of Narayana Guru. For now we are simply finding where our boundaries are located. Very soon with the inspiring examples of the verses we will be eagerly drawn to intelligently expand our consciousness. Narayana Guru's thought experiment has brought us to the starting gate, and the race is about to begin! It is a race with no finish line, only the joy of running wild and free.

Part II

Nataraja Guru:

'Who sits there in the dark? Declare!' says one;
Whereupon another, himself intent to find, in turn
Asks, hearing the first: 'who may you even be?'

For both the word of response is but One.

THIS verse has to be read with the next to make a complete contemplative item. The two men sitting in the dark questioning each other in the name of knowledge about the self in each, represent a dialectical situation by which the Guru here in this tenth verse enters into the heart of the subject of the present work.

Wisdom has always been enshrined in dialogues between two persons - whether Socrates and an Athenian youth; a charioteer and a warrior on the battlefield, as conceived poignantly in the Bhagavad Gita, or more simply as between a teacher and pupil.

Here the counterparts are brought together very closely as dialectically interchangeable factors, with all extraneous elements eliminated as in arranging a laboratory experiment. The Guru, in such a method of approach, seems also to have been fully alive to the requirements of the age of science and of free criticism based on equality of status between the counterparts.

AN EXPERIMENTAL SITUATION:

The dark room is meant for selection and control purposes as in laboratory experiments. The reference to two men, instead of referring to the self in one man, is like bringing in the control element in the experimentally- conceived critical situation by which he is to prove scientifically to himself the reality of Soul or Self. The normative method in science would rely on statistics or a questionnaire to arrive at scientific certitudes. The experimental approach on the other hand is more direct and based on the three stages of experiment, observation and inference. The Guru employs here a method which combines both these, the normative and the experimental together, into a more direct one yielding a certitude that does not violate common sense. He thus fulfils the

requirements of dialectical reasoning rather than relying on the one-sided approach consisting of inductive or deductive proofs known to the empirical scientists or rationalistic philosophers of modern Europe.

To know oneself has been accepted both in the East and in the West, in both ancient and modern times, as constituting the core of wisdom. Knowing oneself is hindered by the outward-going eye which sees other objects besides oneself. Bipolar relations could be established between the self on the one hand and what the self is able to perceive through the outwardly directed senses on the other. This latter aspect could be called the non-self. When the bipolarity is between equals of the same kind or species, the non-self aspect could be spoken of as the other self. Language even permits of a man referring to his wife as his 'better half'. There is thus a parity that we can imagine between two persons. The subjective and the objective selves could be treated as interchangeable terms.

If anything could mar the strict bipolarity of the experimental situation here envisaged for attaining to a correct notion of the Self in man, it would be a third set of elements in the form of various secondary, miscellaneous interests that could dissipate attention and spoil the contemplative attitude required for wisdom. It is for this reason, in order to minimise the possibility of a third factor disturbing the bipolarity that the Guru postulates darkness as a necessary condition for the experimental situation to teach us fully the self-knowledge that could be derived from it. The darkness further implies that contemplative wisdom is what is given to the eye of man when shut and directed not outwardly to objects but to realities belonging to the inner world. The science that results with the eyes open could be called physics and that which persists even when the eyes are shut may be said to belong to metaphysics. Between the visible and the intelligible worlds of Plato these conditions are not strictly applied nor distinguished.

As a result we have the metaphysics of Plato and Aristotle getting confused one with the other. Extraversion or extraspection has pure action implied in it, but introspection is directed to tranquillity or peace. Both are movements of thinking envisaged by the Self in each man.

‘THE WORD OF RESPONSE IS BUT ONE’: What could be called a dialectical proof may be said to be implied here. There are proofs given by a priori reasoning which are not those of experimental sciences like physics. The a posteriori approach is more naturally associated with its history. The telescope or the microscope were used by the earliest modern physicists to help outwardly the normal sight of the open eye. In other words the eyes were to be more open to see truth or reality. The philosophers who were called rationalists or idealists, from Descartes (1596-1650), through Spinoza (1632-1677) and Leibniz (1646-1716) to Kant (1724-1804), admitted the a priori but still thought with objective predilections and spoke of essences, substances or existences which they sometimes compared to some sort of fluids, emanations or monads. The a priori lost its way with them till dialectics began to be recognized again with the German idealists like Hegel (1770-1831). Henri Bergson (1859-1941) was able to look at the self from the pragmatic angle, giving a new start to philosophy from the standpoint of evolutionism. There is however a far cry from evolution as in the philosophy of Spencer (1820-1903) and the Creative Evolution as envisaged by Bergson. Bergson himself however, stops short of employing the fully dialectical method. What he refers to as ‘intuition’, which is reasoning from ‘inside’ an object rather than what is got by viewing it from outside, and which serves physics and metaphysics equally, is really a dialectical form of reasoning which was only beginning to be understood by him and the philosophers of his generation. Bergson remains for us here perhaps the only

philosopher of the West who comes very near to the method of approach adopted by the Guru in the present verse. Bergson wrote:

‘There is one reality at least which we grasp from inside and not by a simple analysis. That is our own person in its flow along time. It is our self that endures. We can sympathise intellectually or rather spiritually with no other thing. But we do sympathise surely with ourselves.’ (13)

Bergson goes on to describe what he is able to grasp about his own self by the method of making his ‘inner power to see’ (*regard intérieur*), take a walk over his person (*promener sur une personne*) as he puts it, and is able to describe poetically the structure of the personality in man. By this treatment of the self, which is not yet fully conceived as it ought to be in conformity with what we have called ‘dialectical methodology’, he kept the company of those who spoke the language of speculative philosophy and other rational or contemplative disciplines. They have each put a barrier between themselves and those who spoke the language of experimental science.

THE TWO SELF-COUNTERPARTS:

The Guru Narayana, by referring to the self in two persons at the same time, makes an epochal innovation by which he lays the foundation for the rapprochement and unification of two branches of wisdom, the physical and the metaphysical, which, by being treated hitherto separately, have lost their full influence in enriching human knowledge to the limit of its possibilities.

On reading this verse carefully it is important to note that the Guru takes pains to give in detail the agonising stages in the dialectical situation portrayed in this metaphysical experiment that he describes. The resolution of the paradoxical duality of the two

persons into the One of the last line does not take place without effort or earnestness.

A thirst for more knowledge is implied on one side and the inclination to remain quiet on the other. If the first man did not insist on knowing, the silence would have remained unbroken and wisdom would not have resulted. Active seeking of wisdom is a form of agony or thirst for knowledge which represents the knocking at the door to open, to put it in the biblical idiom. One has to want to know badly before knowledge can result. The duality then becomes transcended. The two partial selves merge into unity in the Absolute. (We have taken the liberty here of capitalising the initial letter of the 'One' which is only to be expected in the light of orthographic usage in English.)

Unitive understanding consists essentially of abolishing duality. This duality is not to be understood as a merely theological doctrine which in common parlance, especially in India, separates God from Man, as when we speak of the difference between the theological doctrines of a Ramanuja, a Madhva or a Sankara. Monism and monotheism still belong to the ordinary speculation of philosophy of the scholastics or the theologians. The truly dialectical content and import of the term 'non-duality' belongs to the domain of dialectical thinking which, as between the self and the non-self, or as between the one and the many, reduces all duality into unity. The unitive way is that of the central core of the stream of consciousness where it has nothing to do with mechanistic objects hardened as a crust round the liquid central flux of eternal becoming. It could be conceived in terms of a vertical axis passing invisibly at the core of the polyhedron, to which form of clear crystal we could compare pure contemplative consciousness. (For further clarification of such an analogy see 'An Integrated Science of the Absolute' by the same writer.)

(13). p. 177. 'La Pensée et le Mouvant', (Geneva, 1946)

Part III

Got a couple of comments ahead of the class this time—how nice!
Scotty wrote:

Wow!

Amazing, I've been brought to tears!

As I'm finishing this verse I am touched through the teaching and, then Sarah Mcglauchlin's "I won't fear love" comes on the cd mix! How magical, as the "witness", "all" folds in to the "mix" and I arrive to the ecstatic dance of participating and observing my permeable membrane of consciousness.

Blessings to the guru,

Scottie

And from John H:

Autism as a concept was invented by early German physicians and very early psychologists who tried to define someone who was totally withdrawn - people who sit in the corner, in fetal positions. The debate was on whether this was caused by psychological trauma or physical, or some combination of both.

Later, in the 1940's, Dr. Leo Kanner, a very nice man, incidentally, came up with the diagnosis of childhood schitzophrenia, which he abbreviated to the old German medical diagnosis of autism.

Well, as time and science march on, we have come to know that childhood autism probably has little or nothing to do with a psychological trauma, though one must never dismiss that possibility entirely.

So, where am I going with this?

Dr. Lovass at UCLA studied childhood autism and made several startling observations. Basically, everybody has autistic or autistic like behavior. Ever find yourself jiggling your leg a lot for no

reason? Ever feel like you don't fit in with a social setting or that you don't get it - and you just want to walk away? Ever find yourself obsessed with something?

Ever steal a french fry off of someone's plate without asking them? Of course - these are autistic behaviors. His point is that the autistic child is someone who is in that rut of behavior and therefore gets that label, or stereotype. The trick at getting to the autistic mind is to shed the difference between you and that autistic person and see that when it comes to consciousness, you are really quite one.

Once Lovass figured out this basic truth - and Atmo 10 sort of brought this to mind for some reason - various students of his began to pursue the biochemical and bio-medical possibilities that might have hurt the child's body and "trapped" - though this isn't a great word - the consciousness in a body that can't work like everybody else's. This also brought about the rejection of the theory that mothers had psychologically traumatized their infants and liberated many women from a lot of guilt being laid on them. All from Dr. Ivar Lovass realizing that we are all autistic - the difference is the degree and the label for convenience in language, but not necessarily having much to do with the reality.

Not that Dr. Lovass didn't make some mistakes. He did.

But his contribution - which atmo 10 brought to mind - brought on a new age on the diagnosis and treatment of people with autism.

Part IV

Sujit makes us regret we don't speak Malayalam, but compensates for the deficiency:

Thanks for sharing Verse 10 and notes.

Very different in its style, content and dramatization. Just a few words create a whole scene. Verse 10 is a brilliant composition in Malayalam.

Thoughts that came to mind are as follows :- any conceivable world (including the Earth) is an overlay of entity boundaries. Entities are all a matter of the observer's perspective - macro or micro; singular or multiple. If from outer space one is observing the distant Earth, it is one entity - a planet - with no other constituent entities recognized. The macro boundary does not take into account various entities within the Earth - surface, core, oceans, continents, nations, communities, families, individuals, other living beings etc. Down here on Earth, when a man is approaching me, I generalize and see the subject as an entity, a man approaching. Why do I not realize that he is, on the one hand, another collection of entities - millions of entities in his very immune system questioning other intruding entities "who are you"? On the other hand, the same man - 'he' is the insignificant non-entity at different macro perspectives of the greater Universe, from where I do not view him.

Boundaries all over. Sometimes recognized, and sometimes overlooked. Is life itself the cause of these boundaries? Essentially, Narayana Guru's verse cleverly questions our nurtured habit of questioning entity boundaries.

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Susan continues to learn and have epiphanies from her bodywork (Alexander Technique) combined with driving yoga:

Today was a good epiphany day. Most of my thoughts happened while driving, as usual. First, I was on my way to school for a parent meeting and was very stuck in some worries about Peter. I was noticing this stuckness and trying to pull myself out of it. I

was looking out at the trees going by and thinking how I often go outside of myself and into nature to feel better and more relaxed. But then I thought of going inside. It kind of happened because I was thinking of letting my "neck be free" in the Alexandrian way. More and more, I am able to catch myself tensing my neck and then I am able to release the tension and this actually helps me relax mentally too. So I was letting my neck be free and then I related it directly to diving inside myself and being with the Witnessing self. I was thinking that if I can keep remembering my neck, then certainly I can keep remembering the witness/Absolute and in so doing, inhibit all the anxiety and stuckness that shifts around in my mind and clings and strangles like the creepers in Verse 9. So I have been thinking about this throughout the day. I start to go into the worries and then I remember not only my neck but my center — the part of me that is not caught up in the drama. As I thought about this, of course I started to want to figure it out and define it and place it in my body. Gad, my mind is way too busy! When I first thought of it, it was as though I was diving deep into my belly and imagining things falling away in a very vague sense. Then I thought about the third eye and how many people focus there but I'm not sure about that. Then I thought about what you said in class about the Vedanta idea that one starts with that spark of existence, a tendril of light, that fizz inside somehow. So I thought of that sparkling spark (and it isn't any *where* in particular) and that did help me to let the anxiety and concerns fall away. It helped the creepers to loosen and untangle so that I could see the drama as a passing show, observed by the witness.

Then, later in the day, I was driving down the hill and I could see the expanse of Portland in all its structures and grayness. I thought about what it must have been like to have the same view 200 years ago and how green and lush it must have been. Then I realized about the river! The river is like the witness — the river was there 200 years ago and it is there now. It goes along (whether polluted or not!) and is a witness to all the change and all the chaotic human

activity. It is a sparkle of life too, in the landscape, vital to our city and the ecologic balance, just as the witness inside all of us is vital.

It is amazing that just by focusing on the witness, dropping down into that place, on a regular basis, I get more familiar with it. It feels good.

Now I just read the class notes and they are super terrific. Lots of great stuff in there. Thanks so much and I see that my epiphanies are rooted in our study — so exciting.

* * *

Nancy Y. just sent this excerpt to one of her online Yoga Shastra classes (the one I'm in), and it assuredly cross-pollinates with our investigations. The whole article, like most of Sacks' writing, is fascinating and highly educational, and parts of it are even more relevant to our present study. If you read it, you'll discover that Samuel Taylor Coleridge thought of himself, in his most desperate moments, as being like a clinging ivy vine twined around the oak tree of the German authors who inspired him. (I'm pretty sure Narayana Guru hadn't heard about this when he wrote *Atmo*.) Nancy's note:

A recent article—

<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2013/feb/21/speak-memory/>

by neurologist Oliver Sacks makes it clear that the truth of even what we consider our own personal memories can be suspect. His conclusion also offers helpful insights regarding citta vrtti, our mental modifications:

There is, it seems, no mechanism in the mind or the brain for ensuring the truth, or at least the veridical character, of our recollections. We have no direct access to historical truth, and what

we feel or assert to be true (as Helen Keller was in a very good position to note) depends as much on our imagination as our senses. There is no way by which the events of the world can be directly transmitted or recorded in our brains; they are experienced and constructed in a highly subjective way, which is different in every individual to begin with, and differently reinterpreted or reexperienced whenever they are recollected. (The neuroscientist Gerald M. Edelman often speaks of perceiving as “creating,” and remembering as “recreating” or “recategorizing.”) Frequently, our only truth is narrative truth, the stories we tell each other, and ourselves—the stories we continually recategorize and refine. Such subjectivity is built into the very nature of memory, and follows from its basis and mechanisms in the human brain. The wonder is that aberrations of a gross sort are relatively rare, and that, for the most part, our memories are relatively solid and reliable.

We, as human beings, are landed with memory systems that have fallibilities, frailties, and imperfections—but also great flexibility and creativity. Confusion over sources or indifference to them can be a paradoxical strength: if we could tag the sources of all our knowledge, we would be overwhelmed with often irrelevant information.

Indifference to source allows us to assimilate what we read, what we are told, what others say and think and write and paint, as intensely and richly as if they were primary experiences. It allows us to see and hear with other eyes and ears, to enter into other minds, to assimilate the art and science and religion of the whole culture, to enter into and contribute to the common mind, the general commonwealth of knowledge. This sort of sharing and participation, this communion, would not be possible if all our knowledge, our memories, were tagged and identified, seen as private, exclusively ours. Memory is dialogic and arises not only from direct experience but from the intercourse of many minds.