

Toward Grace & Happiness

*WHEN in the Course of Human Events, it becomes necessary for one People to dissolve the Political Bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the Powers of the Earth, the separate and equal Station to which the **Laws of Nature and of Nature's God** entitle them, a decent Respect to the Opinions of Mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the Separation.*

*WE hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, **and the Pursuit of Happiness** –*

from the first two sentences of the Declaration of Independence 7/4/1776

Aldous Huxley used to say that the central problem for humanity is the quest for *grace*. This word he used in what he thought was the sense in which it is used in the New Testament. He explained the word, however, in his own terms. He argued –like Walt Whitman – that the communication and behavior of animals has a naïvete, a simplicity, which man has lost. Man's behavior is corrupted by deceit – even self-deceit – by purpose, and by self-consciousness. As Aldous saw the matter, man has lost the "grace" which animals still have.

In terms of this contrast, Aldous argued that God resembles the animals rather than man: He is ideally unable to deceive and incapable of internal confusions.

In the total scale of beings, therefore, man is as if displaced sideways and lacks the grace which the animals have and which God has.

I argue that art is a part of man's quest for grace; sometimes his ecstasy in partial success, sometimes his rage and agony at failure.

I argue also that there many species of grace within the major genus; and also that there are many kinds of failure and frustration and departures from grace. No doubt each culture has its characteristic species of grace toward which its artists strive, and its own species of failure.

Gregory Bateson, from the opening pages of "Style, Grace and Information in Primitive Art", Steps to an Ecology of Mind pg. 128.

*words lie
that's why
dogs deface
the currency*

Words lie because they are discrete and discriminating. A sound or cluster of sounds that tries to name and mean just one thing or feeling or person or process is denying interbeing, the whole pattern that connects, the brute and beautiful fact that everything is everything. The blood whirling in the valves of the heart and the swirl or spiral of the galaxies and the spiral dance when it is danced and the spiral in the conch shell lying on the beach are all the same whirl or spiral so how dare we say “whirl” or “spiral” or “swirl” or “swoosh” and expect to pin all this down on the specimen board with one sound, one or two syllables, one english word? (I’m not going to give english a capital E here because the bleeding word [bleeding because english-speakers killed so

many indigenees and slaves creating the “commonwealth” and spreading their language all over the world] capitalized suggests that one people or one group of word users has a bigger claim on defining things and processes when in fact there are still a few thousand other sound-clusters inside other languages that go after whirling-spiraling-swooshiness and no one can say that their lies are less than ours, or more.) So every word in every language is some kind of slicing, dicing, vivisectioning lie (that no amount of parenthetical explaining [or bracketed exigesis] can clarify), an illusion or false definition of a simplification, a discrete piece torn from the whole, a segmenting of continuous reality into very convenient little manageable chunks, so that we can assert control, claim property, say in every sound and syllable that the world is won. We own it. When in brute and beautiful fact we and the world are one. Gaia possesses us. In the Now. And in any sustainable future.

Words lie because they are embedded in one language or another and no one language can grasp even a tiny portion of reality. Local languages can usually be trusted to describe local realities better than the languages of imperial conquerors do, but all languages are full of imperfect myths and strained or dead metaphors that can only approximate portions of reality.

Words lie much more when we connect them together in sentences and paragraphs called “legal documents” or “scientific reports” or “journalism.”

Words lie much less in the texts we call “fiction” (extended lying) and “poetry” (boldfaced lying) because the novelists and poets know they are playing with words and praying for some deeper truth to come through them from the Deeper Power that will reveal to people how the lies in “legal documents” and “scientific reports” and “journalistic accounts” and “daily conversations” may be pleasing us as they shield or blind or hurt or kill us.

Words lie the most when embodied processes like singing, drumming, blowing, squatting and tooting, become an abstract noun like “music,” when humble religious rituals like praying or begging decline while “morality” and “theology” become professionalized and exalted, when real chairs made of grainy wood on earth are said to be inferior versions or mere manifestations of a Platonic Ideal Form of “The Chair” high in the sky. I know, it’s so very weird, but people believe in abstract nouns like they believe George W. Bush when he talks about “Weapons of Mass Destruction” and points toward Iraq instead of pointing to our own nuclear power plants, the tiny little prions in our beef, or a new version of the pox in our local university's laboratory. But grasping truth is possible in the pointing, an act of primary communication that invites you to see and feel and hear and perceive for your own self.

Perhaps the first humans to really understand all this constant and pervasive lying in the secondary communication of mere words were the Dogs of ancient Greece. Socrates the Daddy Dog, Antisthenes the Absolute Dog, Diogenes the Dog of Sinope, Crates the Natural Dog and his wife Hipparchia who chose him as her spouse. They did a lot of what dogs do in public, lived very simply with a cloak, a stick and a bag as their

possessions, defaced the currency -- pulling apart some of the worst lies in the language of the Ancient Greeks -- and inspired some Greeks and Romans to follow their poochie path over an eight century period from late 5th Century B.C. to 4th Century A.D. They sought happiness, a mix of serenity and joy, and

“advocated the following propositions:

1. Happiness is living in agreement with nature.
2. Happiness is something available to any person willing to engage in sufficient physical and mental training.
3. The essence of happiness is self-mastery, which manifests itself in the ability to live happily under even highly adverse circumstances.
4. Self-mastery is equivalent to, or entails, a virtuous character.
5. The happy person, as so conceived, is the only person who is truly wise, kingly, and free.
6. Things conventionally deemed necessary for happiness, such as wealth, fame, and political power, have no value in nature.
7. Prime impediments to happiness are false judgements of value, together with the emotional disturbances and vicious character that arise from these false judgments.”

(From A.A. Long’s great essay on “The Socratic Tradition: Diogenes, Crates, and Hellenistic Ethics” in Branham and Goulet-Caze, eds.)

To which we can now add an eighth. It’s lying language which slices up nature, creates “false judgements of value” and that’s why dogs must bark and growl and deface the currency.

Let us generate a question for each of the eight propositions.

1. How can we live in agreement with nature?
2. What are the physical and mental trainings we need?
3. How can we live happily under adverse circumstances?
4. What will the self-mastery of a virtuous character look and sound like?
5. Wise, kingly and free to do what?
6. If wealth, fame and power are out, what does have value in nature?
7. Where do true judgements of process come from?
8. After we have barked and growled and defaced the currency of lying language what do we do next?

The answer to all eight questions is, of course, “grooving!” Check it out, for all eight questions. Grooving is the rite/wright/write/right answer each time.

Or you could say “Grace” is the right answer. Be-in-flow, be in-tune-with-interbeing, go *ngoma*, disappear into the ecology-of-mind via poetry-and-trance-dance, do the polka – these are all correct and rite-on answers.

Since this book is mostly about grooving let’s talk Grace here, the Grace that Gregory Bateson and Aldous Huxley argue God has, and animals have, but that we lack.

From a transcendent higher power or “consciousness perspective” God has the most consciousness, we humans have some, and animals have the least. From an immanent Deeper Power or Grace perspective, God has Grace, animals have Grace and humans are last in line, seeking grace via grooving and artistic creation. That’s why we have to “get down.” Dig deeper. Find out what is immanent or unconscious in us and in nature. Somehow prove, in each new generation, that we are, indeed, *Born to Groove*.

Identifying as Dogs is a step on the path. But dogs don’t have as much Grace as jackals or coyotes or wolves. They certainly don’t have as much Grace as cats of all sizes. Because dogs are more domesticated they are corrupted by humans and wagging their tails way more than Gaia alone requires. I won’t dwell on the deficiencies of man’s best friend because they are all man caused and I don’t want to detract from the wisdom of Antisthenes, Diogenes, Crates and Hipparchia in identifying themselves with nature via the more independent dogs of their day. It was the right thing to do. Plato and Aristotle were wrong in giving us texts and more texts as if Socrates’ doggedness could be transcended and made immortal by translating primary communication into secondary, turning oral-aural interactions into writing.

If we are to cope with the lies of language, get happy by living in agreement with nature and prove that we are born to groove, it is probably to wild animals that we must turn and imitate, it is to totemism and Buddhist taboos against killing other beings that we must return, and it is in the practical praxes of animism and pantheism that we will develop our “primary communication skills” and find Grace in each local community's culture.