

Being without becoming: the end of ambition and living without trying to be a genius

*Pinky: "Gee, Brain, what do you want to do tonight?"
The Brain: "The same thing we do every night, Pinky—try to take over the world..."*

(from the animated series Animaniacs: Pinky and the Brain)

For anyone who doesn't know of or has never investigated the brilliant Pinky and the Brain, this is well worth a watch on many levels, not least because it's utterly hilarious. The plot is always about two laboratory mice who have been experimented on, one of whom has had its cranium enlarged and thereby given immense analytic intelligence, while the other, Pinky, has absolutely no intelligence and yet seems perfectly happy. Pinky always asks the question above and gets the same answer. This intentional or unintentional metaphor is really very much about the nature of ambition and the attempt to do something utterly impossible: the whole notion that a megalomaniac mouse could attempt to take over the world is just ridiculous and this is why it always got laughs but its deeper connection is that it is the exact same predicament and situation that almost every one of us has experienced in life. "It's funny because it's true," as Homer Simpson points out. We are constantly told that life is about "becoming". It's about becoming better, doing your "best", pushing ahead constantly, in fact in either a small or a large way becoming famous and trying to take over the world! Even if it's a small world and one "lowers one's expectations" there is still a real ambition to be king or queen of a small arena which I can say is "mine".

As the Brain says, it's "the same thing we do every night" and every day! It doesn't change, we all get up and try to take over the world, or if the mentality is one of a victim rather than an aggressor we try to prevent the world taking over "me". It's a constant battle to "survive" and to make this day "work out" or make it "wonderful" or "special", or "do" something really "great" with "your" day! Whenever did days get ownership!

The point is that in order to be in the cycle of "becoming", certain premises would need to be considered as true, there would need to be a reason for doing this, which is usually that one thinks one is not "good", or not "enough". Secondly there has to be a belief that what one will be *is* going to be enough and what one "needs or wants". The goal has to be in sight and it has to be one that is really "me". There is immediately a linear track laid out: if I do x, y and z then I will get to my final destination and "take over this world", so to speak! The point is that no matter if one reaches the goal or not, no matter if one is a Mohammed Ali, a Yoyo Ma, a Stephen Hawkins, a Karl Marx, a famous actor, actress or superstar, there will never be a situation where it is ever all enough and the goal is reached. For all these people, whatever their talent or skill, unless there is a situation of non-becoming at the root, life is always going to be a deeply stressful or anxiety-based process of "getting there".

Pinky on the other hand, akin to Baloo of the Jungle Book or Pooh bear and other similar characters, is really not bothered. They may indeed have the potential to use their “gifts” to become great and inspiring members of society, powerful figures to be adored deified, but none of this is particularly interesting. More important for Baloo it's the “bare necessities” (please re-watch and listen to his message here, whatever your age!: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ogQ0uge06o>), for Pooh bear is honey, or cheese if you're Pinky or for Homer Simpson it's chocolate or similar food. This is not to endorse obesity, simply that the nature of these characters' experience is one of connection to what is going on at a basic sensory level. There is no ambition in their life, not even to get what they haven't got because they are focused on what is actually happening. Unfortunately Homer, Pooh and Pinky are all regarded by the world in general as “childish” and “stupid” - interesting that these two words should come together. But over two and a half thousand years ago Lau Tzu the writer of the Tao Te Ching - “the classic of Naturalness and its innate perfection” illustrated these vital points:

Chapter 48

*In the pursuit of intellectual learning, every day something else is acquired.
As Naturalness is perceived spontaneously, every day something drops away
Less and less is done through pre-intended action, until no action is derived this way.
When nothing is done through pre-intended action, nothing is left un-done
Left to take its own course, Nature's direction is without resistance.
Resistance cannot "rule" Nature.*

Chapter 57

*To govern a state/country requires legality
To wage a war requires intellect
But alignment with the Nature of the universe does not require taking this kind of action.
How is this known to be so?
Through it being so.
The greater the number of prohibitions and restrictions applied to people
The more suffering they endure
The sharper the weapons of the people of a state/country are
The more suffering in the land
The more intellectually ingenious the people are
The more bizarre and obscure their products become
The more laws and regulations
The more there are thieves and robbers.
Therefore Natural-human says:
When the “self” takes no action, people align with Natural-order
When Stillness is acknowledged, people align with innate authenticity
When there is no pre-intended action taken, people thrive
When there is no seeking/desire, people return to simplicity.*

Chapter 65

The ancient Natural people knew Naturalness, they knew it could not be “used” to “do” anything, especially to make people more intellectual.

Naturalness allows people to be more simple

Why is it that Natural order does not arise?

Because people are restless and individualistic as they are taught to be intellectually active.

The nation’s tyrant is the one who uses his intellect to govern

The nation’s true ruler is the one who uses no-thing and allows Nature to govern.

Knowing both these principles and seeing them both

Is known as Innate-perfection

Innate-perfection is profound and far-reaching,

It draws things to turn back and return to their Origin.

Chapter 81:

Truthful words are rarely embellished;

Embellished words are rarely truthful.

That which is Naturally-virtuous cannot argue

That which argues cannot perceive Innate-perfection.

Wisdom is not found in extensive intellectual learning

The extensive intellectually-learned are not wise

The Natural-human does not hold back.

Expressing outwards in the world there is great fulfilment

Expressing outwards in the world there is great contentment

Naturalness nourishes all and cannot separate

Naturalness of the Natural-human is awesome and cannot contend.

In the four chapters above the real problem is described, which is that in our focusing to “try” to become something and the driving ambition we are told we need to have, we lose the natural sense of just being without becoming anything. The ambition of parents is passed on to the child at a very early age. Great athletes or musical instrumentalists and people of practised talent have “gained” such expression through years of intense study, practise and refinement of a natural “gift”. Of course there is nothing intrinsically wrong with this, but practise does not make perfect. Perfect already existed before the word “practise” was invented.

The nature of the judgment of the “stupid one”, for example in fictional characters such as Lennie in John Steinbeck’s “Of Mice and Men”, is to not understand the nature of the innocence of the child as Steinbeck emphasizes, and that what is really a simple and non-ambitious expression can be hunted down and attacked by a society which does not wish to engage at such a “basic” level. In ancient times children were the epicentre of society, but in the modern world there is no place for the child, they are seen as a liability, a

responsibility, birth and pregnancy as a luxury, almost like the mother is signing her life away in a mortgage contract by giving birth. It used to be that there was community and connection so that children were brought up together and society was focused on them and the nature of the child was seen as an expression of unbridled life without the requirement to become anything. Ideally the mother instinctively knows this about their child, they are not interested in what they will “become” but what they actually are. If a mother does not sense this, there is dis-ease at hand.

Commonly we are all interested in “becoming”, we are seeking for something, anything other than this. But behind all this absurdity there are the 5 senses and through an awareness of these there is an interest in the very basic, the very simple and the very uncomplicated. The body of humanity is exhausted through trying to drag along the colonial head and shoulders, like an overly-demanding mother who uses corporal punishment to teach her child the “correct manners” Victorian-style. In all of us resides both the inner nature of the infant and the mental derangement of the adult. The two aspects are One, but the infant and its nature are much greater. The infant is at peace being One with to the entire universe while the adult, from within its box, mistakenly believes/ perceives it is separate from it. The adult is ambitious, needs to do its best and out-perform what it did before. The child just “does” for the sheer enjoyment of it, and is fully present with whatever it is doing without the need to try, what it does is perfection itself whether this is recognized by adults or not, the child moves only towards what is interesting to it.

People use only a very small percentage of their brain capacity, that of analytic thought, to be “intelligent” and so those who naturally can extend this function are seen as the geniuses and the others as the dunces, the intellectual rules in the world as it is. However the nature of the infant child’s brain is that more of it is used, not confined to just a particular quadrant but the whole of the brain together, and it is therefore engaged fully, not partially, with the world. Therefore this causes a transposition in our beliefs, in that fundamentally what seems stupid is actually well-rounded, what seems “sharp” is actually un-anchored and top-heavy, what seems clever is actually stupid and what seems stupid is actually of the greatest brilliance, or what we might call natural-intelligence, the whole world is literally upside-down.

This is why the nature of Pinky, Baloo, Pooh bear, Lennie and Homer all point to a direction that is highly sensual and responsive. They do not go the way of the intellect, it isn’t about being completely focused in the head, but in the whole body at once. This is a most ancient of senses and also relates to our time as an infant, life at this level is so utterly simple. In a recent documentary film called “Life in a Day” one of a multitude of clips expressing parts of a normal day for hundreds of people around the world shows a native tribal woman and her child in a forest. She walks along and is thirsty so she instantaneously finds a leaf that holds rainwater. She drinks and give some to her baby. This spontaneous expression is much like life used to be, in perfect harmony with our environment, when all things necessary are provided without trying to acquire them. Though characters of “stupidity” and seeming primitiveness are always the butt of the joke, it is they who ultimately get the last laugh and the universe laughs with them.

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