PSYCHOANALYTIC OBSERVATIONS

Studies of Everyday Human Life — Study I

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE WORD “RASCAL”

Religious Labeling, Moral Superiority, and the Construction of the Outsider

Abstract

Words do more than describe people. They classify them, locate them within moral hierarchies, establish boundaries between communities, and sometimes determine in advance whose voice deserves to be heard.

This study examines the recurrent use of the English word *rascal* by A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, founder of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), as a case study in the psychology of religious labeling.

The purpose is neither to diagnose Prabhupada nor to pathologize ISKCON members or Vaiṣṇava belief. Rather, the study asks a narrower and more general psychological question: **what happens when disagreement with a religious worldview is described not merely as an intellectual error but as evidence of a defect in the person who disagrees?**

Primary-source transcripts show that Prabhupada repeatedly employed *rascal* in strongly polemical contexts, especially toward atheists, certain scientists, political leaders, rival teachers, and people whom he regarded as lacking genuine God or Kṛṣṇa consciousness. In one 1975 conversation he explicitly stated that anyone who was not a *bhakta* was a *rascal*; in another he said that anyone who had not surrendered to Kṛṣṇa fell within categories he characterized as *rascals*.

Using social identity theory, research on delegitimization, moral exclusion, dehumanization, identity-protective cognition and religious fundamentalism, together with cautious psychoanalytic interpretation, this essay investigates how morally charged labels may transform theological disagreement into social categorization.

The central argument is deliberately limited: **calling another person a “rascal” is not by itself proof of dehumanization, psychopathology, hatred, or abuse. Yet when a derogatory label becomes systematically attached to broad classes of human beings because they do not accept the beliefs of an in-group, it can participate in psychological processes of delegitimization, epistemic closure and moral distancing.**

The question therefore extends far beyond ISKCON.

It concerns every community—religious, political, ideological or secular—in which disagreement risks becoming a defect of the dissenter rather than an opportunity for dialogue.

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Before the Word “Rascal”: Jesus, the Pearls, and the Swine

Long before modern religious movements developed their distinctive vocabularies of spiritual authority, sacred traditions had already confronted a difficult question: How should a religious teacher respond to those who reject, misunderstand, ridicule, or oppose what the teacher considers sacred truth?

One striking example appears in the Gospel of Matthew, where Jesus employs a severe animal metaphor. In Matthew 7:6, he warns against giving what is holy to dogs or casting pearls before swine, lest the animals trample the pearls and turn against those who offered them.

Why would a teacher whose message is associated with love, compassion, forgiveness, and concern for the marginalized use such imagery? Does the passage imply that certain human beings are inherently unworthy of spiritual knowledge? Or does it concern discernment, the limits of persuasion, and the recognition that sacred teachings cannot always be communicated meaningfully to an unwilling or hostile audience?

These questions require us to distinguish a religious expression’s literary setting from the psychological consequences of its later interpretation.

The Historical and Literary Context

Matthew 7:6 appears within the Sermon on the Mount, a collection of teachings concerned with ethical conduct, judgment, sincerity, and human behavior. Immediately before this saying, Jesus warns against hypocritical judgment: noticing a minor fault in another person while overlooking a much greater fault in oneself.

This proximity matters. The saying should not automatically be interpreted as permission to classify everyone who disagrees with one’s convictions as spiritually inferior. Its precise referents remain debated. One influential interpretation reads it as a warning against offering what is considered sacred to deliberate contempt or hostility.

Under that reading, the concern is not the permanent worth of another human being but the appropriateness of communication in a particular situation. A teacher may recognize that an audience is unwilling to listen; a

conversation may become hostile; an attempt to share something meaningful may cease to be productive. Recognizing such limits need not imply contempt.

But the distinction is psychologically fragile.

When Discernment Becomes a Judgment of Human Worth

Consider two very different statements:

“There are circumstances in which sharing a sacred teaching may be inappropriate or ineffective.”

“Those who reject our sacred teaching are pigs.”

The first concerns a situation. The second assigns a degrading identity to human beings. In the first, the speaker evaluates the circumstances of communication; in the second, the speaker evaluates the supposed worth of the listener.

This transformation can occur when a metaphor embedded in a specific literary and theological context becomes a general label applied to entire categories of people. The outsider ceases to be a person with different convictions, experiences, or interpretations and becomes an allegedly inferior type of person.

Such language may contribute to out-group derogation, moral exclusion, and, in stronger circumstances, dehumanization. Yet an essential qualification remains: an animal metaphor does not automatically prove that its speaker intended to deny someone’s humanity. Meaning depends on context, purpose, audience, and interpretation. The psychological question is what happens when metaphor becomes a habitual way of perceiving people.

The Authority of Sacred Precedent

A further problem arises when believers appeal to a revered religious figure’s words to justify harsh descriptions of contemporary outsiders. The reasoning may seem straightforward: if Jesus used severe language, severe language must be spiritually legitimate.

But a statement attributed to a teacher in a particular narrative is not automatically a universal instruction to insult dissenters. Nor does the authority of a sacred text eliminate the need to examine how its language affects living relationships.

Appeals to sacred precedent may sometimes discourage scrutiny of inherited speech. An expression can be defended because it comes from a revered authority rather than because its context and effects have been carefully considered.

The question is not whether religious teachers may criticize ideas, actions, or beliefs. They may. The question is whether criticism of beliefs must become degradation of persons.

From Christian Metaphor to Modern Religious Labeling

Across religious traditions, teachers have used words associated with ignorance, foolishness, spiritual blindness, moral corruption, or opposition to divine truth. Some expressions are pedagogical; others are polemical; some are established theological terms; and some function as personal insults. Their meanings cannot responsibly be treated as identical.

Nevertheless, they become psychologically comparable when followers turn them into fixed descriptions of people who do not share their convictions.

This is the broader context in which we turn to the English word “rascal” and its use in the teachings and public discourse of A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, founder of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

The purpose is not to ridicule a deceased religious teacher, invalidate his followers’ devotional experiences, or deny the intellectual and spiritual significance of the tradition he represented. It is to investigate a question applicable to Christianity, Vaiṣṇavism, and other religious and ideological communities alike:

When does the language of spiritual correction become the language of personal degradation?

And what happens psychologically when believers learn to associate disagreement with moral or spiritual inferiority?

These are questions about language, authority, social identity, and human dignity. They deserve examination without hostility toward believers and without granting any religious authority immunity from critical inquiry.

1. A Small Word With a Large Psychological Function

A word can appear trivial until we ask what it accomplishes.

Consider the difference between the following statements:

I believe your argument is mistaken.

and:

You are a rascal.

The first statement identifies a proposition and challenges it.

The second identifies a person and categorizes him or her.

That distinction is the starting point of this study.

The English word *rascal* is itself semantically complicated. Modern dictionaries preserve both relatively mild and considerably more negative meanings. Cambridge includes the familiar or humorous sense of someone who behaves badly but may nevertheless be liked, while also retaining the older meaning of a dishonest person. Oxford similarly records a humorous meaning alongside the older sense of a dishonest man.

Consequently, translating every occurrence mechanically as *zlikovac*, *hulja*, *nitkov*, *bitanga*, *scoundrel* or *villain* risks exaggerating some contexts. Conversely, translating every occurrence as the playful “you little rascal” would sanitize contexts in which the speaker is plainly condemning another person's intelligence, morality or worldview.

Context therefore matters.

And in Prabhupada's recorded speech, many uses are unmistakably polemical.

In a 1977 conversation about scientists and political leaders, he described people who challenged what he regarded as the laws of nature as *rascals* and recalled that he had called them that “from the very beginning.”

In a 1975 conversation he declared that he was not distinguishing Christians, Hindus or Muslims as such; rather, “anyone who is not a bhakta” was, in his terminology, a *rascal*.

In another 1975 conversation he stated even more broadly that anyone who was not Kṛṣṇa conscious was a *rascal*, grounding this judgment in his reading of the Bhagavad-gītā and Bhāgavata.

Elsewhere he connected godlessness and atheism directly with the same category.

This establishes something important.

The phenomenon cannot adequately be explained by saying that *rascal* was merely an affectionate verbal tic.

Sometimes it may have been playful. Sometimes rhetorical. Sometimes directed at a specific claim rather than the total worth of a person.

But the primary sources also demonstrate repeated serious use of the term as a negative category for people regarded as spiritually or epistemically mistaken.

The psychological question begins there.

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2. Four Principles, Sixteen Rounds — and an Important Distinction

ISKCON religious discipline traditionally includes four regulative principles: abstention from meat-eating, illicit sexual activity, intoxication and gambling. Initiated practitioners are also expected to chant a minimum of sixteen rounds of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra daily.

These are not merely popular descriptions of ISKCON practice. Initiation transcripts show candidates being asked explicitly to state the four principles and their commitment to sixteen rounds, and ISKCON's Governing Body Commission later formally incorporated these practices into eligibility requirements for initiation.

But methodological precision requires an important distinction.

The available evidence does **not** justify simplifying Prabhupada's position into:

“Anyone who fails to chant exactly sixteen rounds is therefore automatically a rascal.”

The sixteen-round requirement is clearly documented as a devotional discipline and initiation standard. But Prabhupada's broad uses of *rascal* frequently concern what he perceived as atheism, materialism, refusal to surrender to Kṛṣṇa, rejection of bhakti, speculative philosophy, political pretension or scientific claims he considered godless.

This distinction matters.

Criticism becomes stronger—not weaker—when it criticizes what someone demonstrably said rather than an exaggerated version of it.

And what the sources demonstrably show is already psychologically significant: categories such as “nondevotee,” “godless,” “not Kṛṣṇa conscious,” or “not surrendered to Kṛṣṇa” could become associated with an explicitly derogatory classification.

The central issue is therefore not a numerical question about beads.

It is a question about **moral and epistemic classification**.

3. From “Your Belief Is Wrong” to “There Is Something Wrong With You”

Human beings disagree continuously.

We disagree about politics, medicine, economics, morality, religion, music, history, relationships and the meaning of life.

Ordinarily, disagreement leaves open at least one psychologically important possibility:

I may be wrong.

But some systems of thought can develop mechanisms that make this possibility increasingly difficult to entertain.

Imagine a belief system containing the following implicit structure:

If you accept our conclusion, you have understood reality.

If you reject our conclusion, your rejection demonstrates your ignorance.

The dissenter now encounters an unusual epistemic problem.

Agreement validates the system.

But disagreement may also validate the system, because disagreement itself is interpreted as evidence of the defect the system predicts.

The belief structure begins to become self-protective.

A theological disagreement can consequently undergo a subtle transformation:

proposition → judgment → identity.

First:

You hold an incorrect belief.

Then:

Your consciousness is defective.

Finally:

You are a fool, rascal, contaminated person, demon, materialist, offender, or member of some other morally diminished category.

At that point language is no longer merely describing theology.

It is organizing the social world.

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4. The Construction of “Us” and “Them”

Social psychology has repeatedly demonstrated how readily human beings categorize themselves and others into groups.

Research deriving from the social identity tradition shows that even minimal, experimentally created group divisions can produce in-group preferences and differences in judgments and behavior. The boundary need not begin with centuries of theology or political conflict; categorization itself can become psychologically consequential.

Religion can make such boundaries exceptionally meaningful because religious identity may concern not merely preference but ultimate reality.

The difference between groups can become:

not simply *our practice/their practice*,

but *truth/error*;

not merely *our community/their community*,

but *spiritual knowledge/ignorance*;

not merely *our teacher/their teacher*,

but *authorized knowledge/speculation*;

and eventually:

those who understand/those who are rascals.

This does not mean that strong religious conviction inevitably produces hostility.

It does not.

Nor is religious identity uniquely susceptible to in-group/out-group psychology. Political movements, national identities, activist communities, academic schools and even recreational groups can develop powerful boundaries.

Indeed, research suggests that prejudice toward ideologically dissimilar groups is not confined simply to people high in religious fundamentalism; people across ideological positions can negatively evaluate groups whose values threaten their own.

That observation is essential.

The subject of this essay is not “what is wrong with religious people.”

It is a much more universal human vulnerability:

the temptation to transform “people who disagree with us” into “a defective kind of people.”

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5. Delegitimization: When a Label Does More Than Insult

Social psychologist Daniel Bar-Tal used the concept of **delegitimization** to describe the categorization of groups into extremely negative social categories that place them outside what the in-group considers acceptable norms and values. Such categorization can help explain conflict, reinforce perceptions of threat and justify increasingly negative treatment of an out-group.

This provides a more precise concept for our present analysis than immediately using the stronger word *dehumanization*.

A label can delegitimize without literally denying someone's humanity.

“Rascal” is a useful example.

Calling someone a rascal does not literally say:

You are not human.

But if the term is systematically attached to people whose defining characteristic is their refusal to accept the in-group's ultimate truth, it can communicate:

Your intellectual standing is compromised.

Your moral judgment cannot be trusted.

Your interpretation of reality is fundamentally defective.

Your disagreement is evidence against you.

The crucial psychological effect may therefore be less dramatic than literal dehumanization but still consequential:

the dissenter loses epistemic legitimacy.

He may continue to speak.

But his speech has already been classified.

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6. When the Label Becomes an Argument

Here we encounter one of the most important mechanisms in the entire discussion.

Suppose a scientist criticizes a religious cosmological claim.

One possible response is:

Here is why the scientist's evidence is wrong.

Another is:

Scientists who deny God are rascals.

The second response may contain a theological judgment, but if it is used as a substitute for engaging the argument, it also creates an **ad hominem structure**.

The question subtly changes from:

Is this argument correct?

to:

What kind of person would make this argument?

Prabhupada's conversations provide examples in which scientists are explicitly described as *rascals* because their conclusions conflict with his theological understanding of nature and God.

This does not establish that every argument he offered against science was ad hominem. He frequently attempted substantive philosophical arguments as well.

But recurrent negative labeling introduces another possibility:

the social identity of the speaker can begin to determine the perceived value of the evidence.

This is closely related to contemporary discussions of **identity-protective reasoning**—processes in which people evaluate information partly in ways that protect socially significant identities and commitments. Research on motivated cognition describes how protecting group identity can influence the interpretation and maintenance of beliefs, especially when contested propositions become markers of group loyalty.

Again, this mechanism is not uniquely religious.

A political partisan can do it.

An atheist can do it.

A nationalist can do it.

A scientist can do it.

A psychoanalyst can do it.

An AI system can do it indirectly by reproducing assumptions embedded in its prompt or sources.

No community is automatically exempt.

7. The Psychoanalytic Perspective: Splitting the Moral World

Psychoanalysis offers another vocabulary, but it must be used cautiously.

Concepts such as **splitting**, idealization, devaluation, projection and identification with authority can illuminate group behavior, but they cannot legitimately be converted into diagnoses of individuals we have never clinically examined.

We therefore use them here as interpretive models.

Splitting, in its broad psychodynamic sense, concerns difficulty integrating positive and negative qualities within a complex whole. Reality becomes psychologically easier to organize when ambiguous objects are divided into relatively pure categories.

Good/bad.

Pure/contaminated.

Devotee/materialist.

Spiritual/material.

Surrendered/rebellious.

Authorized/speculative.

Knowledgeable/rascal.

The attraction of binary categories is understandable.

Ambivalence is psychologically demanding.

To acknowledge that a revered spiritual teacher may possess profound insights and simultaneously use language we consider unnecessarily contemptuous requires holding two emotionally conflicting representations at once.

Likewise, acknowledging that an outsider may reject one's central theology while nevertheless possessing wisdom, kindness, integrity and knowledge requires abandoning a simple correspondence between **doctrinal correctness and human worth**.

The psychologically easier solution can be idealization on one side and devaluation on the other.

But easier does not mean inevitable.

Mature religious thought is capable of complexity.

A person can believe:

My tradition is true.

while simultaneously believing:

The person who rejects my tradition may know things I do not know, may be morally admirable, and deserves my respect.

That distinction may represent one of the most important psychological protections against religious tribalism.

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8. Authority and the Inheritance of Language

Religious language acquires unusual psychological power when it originates with a revered founder.

A harsh expression spoken by an ordinary member can be questioned.

The same expression spoken repeatedly by a founder regarded as an extraordinary spiritual authority may become something else:

a linguistic precedent.

Followers inherit not only doctrines.

They may inherit categories.

Metaphors.

Enemies.

Jokes.

Taboos.

Ways of describing outsiders.

And sometimes even a characteristic emotional tone.

This creates an important problem for subsequent generations.

Must preserving a teacher's spiritual message require reproducing every rhetorical habit of the teacher?

Or can a tradition distinguish between enduring theological principles and historically situated modes of speech?

There is evidence that such reflection already exists within contemporary ISKCON discourse. An ISKCON News essay, for example, explicitly criticized the tendency of devotees to describe other devotees who disagree on details as faithless or even demonic, calling such narrow-minded discourse corrosive.

That internal criticism matters.

It demonstrates why it would be inaccurate to portray contemporary ISKCON as psychologically homogeneous.

There are multiple voices inside a religious movement.

Some preserve older rhetoric.

Some reinterpret it.

Some challenge it.

Some contextualize it.

Some reject its harsher manifestations while retaining theological commitment.

A serious psychological analysis must leave room for all of them.

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9. A Striking Internal Tension: “Rascals” and “Respect to All”

Perhaps the most interesting part of the problem appears when Prabhupada's polemical language is placed beside another teaching he repeatedly emphasized.

Quoting Caitanya Mahāprabhu, he taught:

tṛṇād api sunīcena
taror api sahiṣṇunā
amāninā mānadena
kīrtanīyaḥ sadā hariḥ

In his explanation, one should not demand respect for oneself but should be prepared to give respect to others.

Elsewhere in the same broader scriptural tradition, Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 11.18.31 is translated as teaching that a saintly person should not belittle others or create unnecessary hostility.

We therefore encounter a genuine tension.

On one side:

humility, tolerance, respect for others.

On the other:

rascals, fools, asses, godless men, and other highly negative classifications.

It would be intellectually dishonest to erase either side.

A critic who quoted only the harsh language would risk caricaturing the tradition.

A defender who quoted only the language of humility would risk sanitizing the historical record.

The psychologically interesting question lies precisely in their coexistence.

How does a religious community integrate universal respect with polemical certainty?

When does forceful criticism of an idea remain criticism of an idea?

When does it become contempt for a person?

And how can a tradition preserve conviction without allowing conviction to become a license for humiliation?

Those questions cannot be answered simply by choosing the quotation we prefer.

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10. Is “Rascal” Dehumanization?

This requires precision.

Not necessarily.

Dehumanization has a specific psychological literature. Nick Haslam's influential framework distinguishes forms involving denial of uniquely human characteristics and forms involving denial of characteristics considered fundamental to human nature. Animalistic dehumanization, in particular, can involve representing people as animal-like and deficient in qualities attributed uniquely to humans.

Calling someone a *rascal* does not automatically accomplish this.

It is a negative human category.

Therefore:

rascal ≠ automatically dehumanized person.

But the broader linguistic environment matters.

When negative moral labels combine with explicit animal comparisons, concepts such as animalistic dehumanization become considerably more relevant.

Research shows that animalistic slurs can increase willingness to harm or negatively evaluate target groups, although the psychological pathway is more complicated than simply making targets seem “less human.” Experimental work has found that animalistic slurs can increase harm partly by making targeted groups appear socially undesirable.

This is why analytical vocabulary should be graded rather than sensationalized.

We might imagine a continuum:

disagreement → negative evaluation → derogatory labeling → delegitimization → moral exclusion → dehumanization.

Movement along this continuum is not automatic.

Evidence is required at every step.

And that methodological restraint protects the credibility of criticism.

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11. Moral Exclusion: Who Remains Inside the Circle of Concern?

Susan Opotow's work on **moral exclusion** provides another important distinction.

Moral exclusion occurs when individuals or groups are perceived as falling outside the boundaries within which ordinary considerations of fairness and moral obligation fully apply. Those outside the moral community can increasingly be regarded as undeserving or expendable.

Nothing examined so far proves that ISKCON theology as such morally excludes all nondevotees.

That would be an unjustified leap.

Vaiṣṇava theology also contains strong ideas of universal spiritual identity, compassion, preaching for the benefit of others and respect toward living beings.

Nevertheless, recurrent derogatory labeling creates a psychologically relevant question:

Does describing an out-group as fools, rascals, asses or contaminated people gradually make dismissive treatment of them feel more acceptable?

This question becomes especially important when the target is not an abstract ideological opponent but:

a parent,

a child,

a spouse,

a former member,

a colleague,

a neighbor,

or a friend.

At that point theological categorization enters intimate human relationships.

The outsider is no longer “the materialists.”

The outsider is someone sitting at the same dinner table.

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12. Sacred Values and Why Criticism Can Feel Like Attack

Religious beliefs can become **sacred values**—commitments that are experienced differently from ordinary preferences and practical trade-offs.

Research suggests that religious ritual, perceived group threat and sacred-value commitments can interact in ways that strengthen the non-negotiable character of particular beliefs.

This helps explain something that otherwise appears puzzling.

Why can a mild historical question—

Was the founder perhaps too harsh in this particular statement?

—produce an emotional reaction far stronger than the literal question appears to warrant?

One possibility is that the listener does not experience the question as an isolated linguistic criticism.

It may be experienced as:

criticism of the founder → criticism of spiritual authority → criticism of the tradition → criticism of Kṛṣṇa → criticism of my community → criticism of who I am.

Several layers of identity can collapse into one another.

When this happens, criticism of a sentence can feel like an attack on the self.

The response may consequently be far stronger than would be predicted from the surface disagreement alone.

This is one area where concepts related to identity fusion may become relevant. Identity-fusion research examines intense feelings of oneness between personal and group identity and their association, in some contexts, with unusually strong pro-group commitment.

But again, caution is essential.

We cannot infer identity fusion merely because someone strongly defends a religious founder.

It is a research framework, not a diagnostic label.

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13. Epistemic Closure: Can the Outsider Ever Be Right?

Now we reach perhaps the deepest problem.

Suppose a belief system says:

Those who understand spiritual reality will accept X.

A person rejects X.

The system replies:

Your rejection proves that you do not understand spiritual reality.

The person offers evidence.

The system replies:

Your evidence comes from materialistic speculation.

The person identifies a contradiction.

The system replies:

Your mind cannot understand because it is conditioned.

The person criticizes the authority.

The system replies:

Only a spiritually ignorant person would criticize the authority.

At this point the problem is no longer merely theological.

It is epistemological.

What possible evidence could count against the system?

If every objection can be reinterpreted as evidence of the objector's ignorance, the system acquires a self-sealing quality.

Research on identity-protective cognition is useful here because group-linked commitments can affect how evidence is evaluated and can promote belief perseverance when contrary evidence threatens socially significant identities.

But there is an important corrective.

Identity protection is not always irrational, and distrust of hostile or systematically biased external sources can sometimes be epistemically defensible. Recent philosophical work has explicitly argued against treating all identity-protective reasoning as inherently pathological.

The question is therefore not:

Does this community protect its worldview?

Every worldview does.

The better question is:

Does the worldview retain a genuine mechanism by which it could discover that one of its own claims, interpretations or authorities was mistaken?

That is a much harder test.

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14. Religious Fundamentalism, Certainty and the Need for Closure

Psychological research has investigated associations among religious fundamentalism, prejudice, authoritarianism and need for cognitive closure.

Some studies suggest that fundamentalist systems can provide epistemic consistency and certainty, and that groups perceived as threatening that certainty may consequently become targets of derogation.

But this literature must not be misused.

It does not establish:

religion causes prejudice.

Nor:

religious people are psychologically rigid.

Nor:

ISKCON members possess a particular personality disorder.

Indeed, contemporary research complicates simple narratives. People both high and low in religious fundamentalism can display prejudice toward groups whose values conflict with their own.

The more universal principle may therefore be:

Human beings have difficulty remaining psychologically neutral toward groups that appear to threaten values central to their identity.

Religion is one arena in which this occurs.

It is not the only one.

15. The Danger of Explaining Too Much

At this point psychoanalytic writing faces its own temptation.

We could say:

“They call outsiders rascals because they secretly fear them.”

Or:

“They feel inferior and therefore compensate with superiority.”

Or:

“They project their forbidden impulses onto outsiders.”

Or:

“They are narcissistically defending their leader.”

Each statement may sound psychologically sophisticated.

None follows automatically from the evidence.

This is one of the most important methodological rules of *Psychoanalytic Observations*:

A plausible psychological explanation is not automatically a demonstrated psychological explanation.

We can ask whether devaluation serves a defensive function.

We can examine whether idealization of authority makes criticism threatening.

We can investigate whether projection, splitting or cognitive dissonance provide useful models.

But unless we possess adequate evidence about a particular individual, we cannot know his or her unconscious motive.

Psychology becomes pseudoscience when every behavior can be effortlessly explained by an invisible mechanism that cannot itself be tested.

Therefore this study analyzes **possible functions of discourse**, not the hidden minds of particular believers.

16. The Difference Between Explanation and Justification

Context matters.

Prabhupada came from a particular historical, linguistic and religious world. His English was shaped by colonial and postcolonial India, Bengali linguistic habits, Sanskritic theological categories and the missionary urgency of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism.

The word *rascal* itself also possessed rhetorical registers that do not map perfectly onto a single Croatian, Serbian or other modern translation.

Understanding this context is necessary.

But context and justification are different questions.

To explain why someone spoke harshly is not necessarily to conclude that speaking harshly was ethically appropriate.

Conversely, to judge a historical expression inappropriate by contemporary standards does not prove that its speaker intended the most extreme meaning available to a modern reader.

Historical interpretation therefore requires two questions:

What did the speaker probably mean?

and:

What psychological and social effects can this language have when inherited and repeated today?

The second question may ultimately matter more.

Because contemporary followers are not living in 1966.

Language continues to act after its original context has disappeared.

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17. Can Strong Conviction Exist Without Contempt?

This may be the constructive heart of the entire study.

A religious believer does not have to become a relativist in order to respect a nonbeliever.

A Vaiṣṇava can believe Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

A Christian can believe Christ is uniquely salvific.

A Muslim can believe the Qur'an is divine revelation.

An Advaitin can believe nondual Brahman represents ultimate reality.

An atheist can believe none of these metaphysical claims is sufficiently demonstrated.

None of those positions logically requires:

therefore the person who disagrees with me is a rascal.

Conviction answers:

What do I believe to be true?

Contempt answers:

What kind of human being do I think you are because you disagree?

Those are different questions.

Confusing them is psychologically dangerous.

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18. A Vaiṣṇava Alternative Already Exists Inside the Tradition

Interestingly, the alternative does not have to be imported from secular liberalism.

It can be found inside Vaiṣṇava teaching itself.

The instruction *amāninā mānadena*—not demanding honor for oneself while offering respect to others—contains the seed of a radically different intergroup psychology. Prabhupada himself repeatedly taught this ideal.

Taken seriously, it allows a believer to say:

I think your metaphysics is mistaken.

without:

I therefore despise you.

It allows:

I will defend my tradition.

without:

Your disagreement removes your dignity.

It permits:

I believe my spiritual path is true.

while still acknowledging:

You remain a complex human being whose intelligence, suffering, love, experience and moral worth cannot be reduced to whether you agree with me.

This is not weakness of conviction.

It may be a more psychologically mature form of conviction.

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19. What We Can — and Cannot — Conclude

We can conclude from primary sources that Prabhupada repeatedly used *rascal* in strongly negative polemical contexts.

We can conclude that he sometimes applied the category very broadly, including explicit statements identifying non-*bhaktas*, godless people or people outside Kṛṣṇa consciousness as *rascals*.

We can conclude that sixteen rounds and the four regulative principles are established ISKCON devotional and initiation standards.

We cannot conclude from the evidence examined here that every person who fails to chant sixteen rounds was thereby explicitly defined by Prabhupada as a *rascal*.

We can conclude that derogatory out-group labeling is relevant to established psychological research on social categorization, delegitimization, moral exclusion and—in stronger cases—dehumanization.

We cannot conclude that every use of *rascal* constitutes dehumanization.

We cannot diagnose Prabhupada.

We cannot diagnose contemporary ISKCON members.

We cannot infer the unconscious motives of an individual merely because he or she repeats the language of a religious authority.

And we should not describe an entire diverse international religious movement as psychologically pathological on the basis of selected statements.

But neither should caution become an excuse for avoiding difficult evidence.

The documented rhetoric is real.

Its psychological implications deserve examination.

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20. Beyond the Rascal

Perhaps the most important question is ultimately not what *rascal* meant fifty years ago.

It is what happens inside us when we begin needing such words.

Every worldview encounters people who reject it.

Every community encounters dissent.

Every authority encounters criticism.

The decisive psychological moment arrives when we must choose how to understand the person standing on the other side.

Is he mistaken?

Ignorant?

Different?

Threatening?

Immoral?

Contaminated?

A rascal?

An enemy?

An animal?

Or simply another human being whose consciousness cannot be reduced to his agreement with our own?

There is an enormous psychological distance between the first disagreement and the final devaluation.

Yet human history repeatedly demonstrates how easily that distance can shrink.

Susan Opotow's work on moral exclusion is particularly relevant here because it emphasizes that exclusion from the moral community exists on a continuum, from subtle interpersonal processes to severe forms of injustice. Importantly, her work also identifies dissent, divergent opinions and pluralistic perspectives as forces capable of widening the scope of justice rather than narrowing it.

Perhaps that provides the most constructive conclusion.

The answer to dogmatism is not another dogmatism.

The answer to religious contempt is not contempt for religious people.

The answer to the word *rascal* is not to find a new category of people whom we ourselves are permitted to call rascals.

The deeper task is to resist the psychological mechanism itself.

To preserve disagreement without destroying dignity.

To criticize authority without needing to demonize those who trust it.

To hold conviction without converting conviction into superiority.

And to remain capable of one of the most difficult sentences available to the human mind:

“I believe you are profoundly mistaken—and I may still have something to learn from you.”

Epilogue — When Disagreement Becomes a Defect

A healthy dialogue begins with the possibility that two human beings can look at the same reality and arrive at different conclusions.

An unhealthy dialogue begins when one person's disagreement becomes evidence of that person's inferiority.

At that moment, argument quietly becomes classification.

The question is no longer:

“Is what you are saying true?”

It becomes:

“What is wrong with you that prevents you from seeing what I already know?”

That transformation can occur in a temple.

It can occur in a church.

It can occur in a political party.

It can occur in a university.

It can occur in an activist movement.

It can occur in science.

It can occur on social media.

And it can occur between two people sitting across a table.

That is why the psychology of a single word matters.

Rascal is only our first case study.

The phenomenon is universal.

Whenever disagreement becomes a diagnosis of the dissenter, human dialogue is in danger.

And whenever we recover the ability to distinguish **the person from the proposition**, dialogue becomes possible again.

Methodological Note — The Third Path

This study inaugurates *Psychoanalytic Observations — Studies of Everyday Human Life*, a series devoted to examining concrete psychological, social, emotional and religious phenomena without reducing human beings to diagnostic labels.

The project also represents an experiment in human–artificial intelligence collaboration.

Its working principle may be described as a **hybrid human–AI epistemological community**: human experience identifies the question; independent artificial-intelligence systems can generate competing interpretations; primary sources and scientific literature test those interpretations; and human judgment remains responsible for the final synthesis.

The objective is not to replace human thought with artificial intelligence.

Nor is it to use AI as an authority whose conclusions must be accepted.

It is:

Human intelligence in dialogue with artificial intelligence.

Different participants may notice different patterns. They may disagree. They may identify errors in one another's reasoning.

Such disagreement is not a failure of the method.

It is part of its error-correcting architecture.

No conclusion becomes true merely because a human strongly believes it.

No conclusion becomes true because one AI generates it.

And no conclusion becomes true merely because two AI systems agree with each other.

The final standard remains evidence, transparent reasoning, intellectual honesty and willingness to revise one's conclusions.

In that sense, *The Third Path* does not seek a fusion in which human and artificial intelligence lose their identities.

It seeks cooperation in which each retains its distinct role while participating in a larger cognitive process—an emerging form of the **extended mind**, directed toward understanding rather than domination.

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