

Philosophy that is Mindful

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I have raised the question of meaning and of mystery. But how might I intimate the meaning of meaning and of mystery?

Perhaps I might appeal to love in your lives: for genuine love embodies an appreciation of the other person's meaning and mystery, and it involves a mutual attention which fosters growth of meaning with a deeper growth of mystery. And in the fullness of human love, in married love, there is the subtle entwining of incarnate questings which in its unique sufficient insufficiency points deeper still towards meaning and towards mystery.

But my appeal to this element in life may well lack force – for love in our skin-deep culture may mean little more than the muddle of adolescent mating or the prosaic acceptance of psychosexual differences in partners in a social role. Still, the area of mutual married attention or of committed friendship is the area of greatest hope in the effort we need to make to restore respect for meaning and for mystery. And here I note that I do no better than God, who draws our attention to marriage as a pointer to the great mystery which is the meaning of history: the here-now limitless divine affection for each Tom, Dick and Mary of us.

Whether we are married or not, surely there are few of us for whom someone does not mean much? And it is to that element in experience that I appeal in order to intimate the neglected meaning of meaning and of mystery. That neglect is closely associated with the neglect

of person in our culture, and so a stress on interpersonal meaning is focally relevant. We tend to read a man's book or hear a man's words in detachment from the meaning and the mystery of him and of ourselves. That detachment pivots on the centuries-old operative denial of the two great chasms that constitute the opaqueness of dialogue. There is a first chasm relating to actual meaning, and a second chasm relating to mystery and to potential meaning. The first chasm is the chasm between words and meaning: for words are no more than empty pointers, hollow signs and sounds that must be minded by speaker and listener. If one speaks words such as 'meaning' and 'mystery' with a meaning that is decades-deep and soundless, the listener must have decade-depths of appreciative reflection to share adequately that meaning.

In so far as the listener has not those depths but remains open to them, then the heard familiar words will intimate a mystery; they may even draw him or her to a slow-growing sharing of fuller human meaning. But in so far as the listener may already have been trapped by the commercial contempt for meaning, then he will cage the words in a neon view. Like the taximan in a new suburb, he can find his way round a new corner of the city of thought without raising any question regarding the dimensions of meaning of the city or the suburb.

I have spoken here of the chasm between worlds and meaning – but that chasm lies between all human gestures and meaning. In expressions of the love of man and woman, words do not suffice: there is the life-lined glance, the touch, the embrace, the momentum towards naked mediacy. In a developed culture, that momentum falls short

of the fullness of embodied glee, for that orgasmic glee is present in ontic truth only where it is a springboard to ever fuller permanently shared married meaning. One might well pause here to consider the failure of so many married lives in not availing of the subtlety of the sexuality of the Naked Ape as mediating mutually-attentive total meaning. One might pause to consider the idiocy of random mating as excluding nuanced peak-experienced depth of the human happiness. Again, one might consider the lack of the sublimated sexuality of coquetry which leaves our living less exuberant, less indicative of immortality and eternal glee. But these are not directly our present concern. Our present concern is with the chasm between gesture and meaning. One might well sum up that chasm in relation to human love with the words of Rainer Maria Rilke: "Love consists in this, that two solitudes guard and bound and greet each other." No gesture can bridge the chasm between those solitudes in this life. It is indeed only in resurrected glee that human solitudes fuse in the merriment of Tri-personal affection.

And this leads me on to consider briefly the second chasm, the chasm between meaning and mystery.

In so far as a person follows an authentic life-long search for meaning, the meaning reached bears with it an intimation of its own thinness and of the depth of meaning that lies strictly beyond our human range, in mystery. But when I say beyond, I do not point out beyond the cosmos to mystery. The hard fact, the hard-to-understand fact, is that each of us is, in a strictly defined sense, a divine mystery; for each of us is definable as an incarnate aspiration for total interpersonal understanding, an aspiration which is fulfilled

only in the mystery of eternal divine affection.

To say more here about this second chasm would lead us deeper than popular print. That second chasm is related to the fact that in this life the meaning of "Yes", by which we acknowledge existence, is obscure, opaque. We do not understand existence, we reach it darkly in affirmation. The two chasms I spoke of are indeed related to the three components in human knowing, experience, understanding, and judgement. There is a chasm between experience and understanding. There is the greater chasm relating to the difference between understanding and judgement. It is the latter chasm that leaves us in this life reaching endlessly but most fruitfully towards the meaning of our own aspirations, and of history, and of divine understanding, towards a meaning that gains its true meaning only in so far as we existentially, and with incarnate feeling, acknowledge that we are entirely in darkness regarding the meaning of existence. What Aquinas understood of God applies also to the human mystery; *nescimus quid sit Deus*, we do not know what God is.