

Philosophy that is Mindful

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In the first of this series of articles I made a distinction, which I have maintained, between philosophy as popularly understood – “what’s your philosophy of life?” – and philosophy as a serious scientific pursuit; philosophy, in my terms, as a basic personal methodological reflection. Philosophy in that sense I would name Methodology. It raises such questions as “What are we at?” in a very precise manner. And by ‘it’ I mean of course, you and I. But are we in fact raising such questions in that manner?

So far in this series I have written of philosophy, of the common tonality of the orientation of a people, their ‘philosophy of life’. But that philosophy of life cannot live without a pulsing of deeper reflection. Methodology and philosophy are not worlds apart in a community. Both mediate each other’s necessary development but without a pulsing of deeper reflection. Without the presence of a philosophy of life of some significance in a community permitted, encouraged, to mediate the methodological reflection, that methodological reflection withers. I think here, as illustration, of the detached reflections of so many Oxford philosophers, personally remote from the question that they seem to raise. I think of the Oxford journal *Mind*, which does not seem to mind. Kierkegaard could not have survived in Oxford.

Methodological questions are only adequately pursued, then, in so far as they well up existentially in human subjects whose philosophy

of life calls for thematization, deepening.

Nor, inversely, can a philosophy of life of a community in our times survive, much less thrive, without a methodological deepening. For, our time in history is one in which the development of the two lowest sciences, physics and chemistry, hold sway, and that sway tends with increasing momentum toward a dictatorship of electrons and plastics. In so far as a community, a nation, is not deeply, methodologically, **minded**, that momentum not only gathers, but is gathered, gathered up as a pearl of economic price. The nation marches towards a numb and mindless affluence.

And here I do not think of Oxford or of continental existentialists but of ourselves. I find our national unconcern for human meaning distressing. Our young nation found it worthwhile to finance an Institute for Theoretical Physics – which in fact does us credit – but that concern for the electron was not paralleled adequately on the level of man. So it is that an Institute for Methodological Anthropology is still a thing of the future, and its financing seems to depend on meagre Jesuit resources or the generosity of American foundations. We are in the presence of a national scandal.

“What are we at?” The question is not being asked in any depth, methodologically, and so we drift along, some clinging to the fading flower of a rich heritage, some self-neglectingly reaching for continental meaning, most perhaps simply reaching for an extra pound.

Yet the question begins to be asked by a younger generation, and I do not think my optimism folly when I consider this decade as one of the emergence of something unique in Ireland, a deeper method-

ological concern for human meaning. Moreover, it is only within that larger context that one can appreciate adequately, for example, the significance of phonemic regionalisation as a human enrichment. It is one thing to have a philosophy of language revival. It is quite another, distant, thing to reach methodologically and anthropologically in the perspective of a million years or more for the global meaning of a Celtic people.