

Daily Meditation 03/17/2022

Rank on the Marvel of Creation vs. a Culture of Rationality

Good morning.

Today we're meditating on some more insight from Otto Rank on... well on many topics... but to begin with a quotation where he says that religion admits that there's an unknown.

There are a lot of things that humans do not know about. And he respected that. He felt that his field of psychology did not have all the answers, or even all the questions. And I think that's a stage of humility that we can all confess to if we look at the picture.

And this is true of all our efforts as human beings, including, of course, every single religion. Religion itself can sometimes get overly satisfied and have its own ego and think that it has all the answers-- maybe in a book, a holy book, a Bible--or even all the questions. So, religion itself needs to learn something about humility too.

And in fact, the deeper thinkers in religion, who are the mystics, develop the idea of the apophatic divinity, which is, well, Thomas Aquinas says, "We do not know what God is, we only know what God is not."

So, there are limits on our knowledge about the mystery, even in religion.

But as I pointed out earlier in this essay, I was reminded, again, of my experience with Wes Jackson, a farmer was trying to do farming differently. And I quote him here in the essay about how "we humans should lead with what we're best at, which is ignorance."

We should begin every conversation in all of our studies and our sciences with a statement that, actually, we're ignorant, but this is what we're learning.

But he had another statement that day that has stuck with me all these years, because it was decades ago that I met him on his front porch in Kansas. He said that "we've been doing farming wrong for 10,000 years."

I'll never forget, my jaw dropped, as it does now. I think it's the most radical sentence I've overheard in my life. "We've been doing farming wrong for 10,000 years."

And then he went on to explain that by turning the soil over, to put our seeds in, to plant, we set the stage for the destruction of soil that has been going on ever since; and, of course, is reaching a climax in our time in terms of the loss of soil all along the world.

And that's why he devoted himself to showing how humans could be getting our food in ways by imitating the prairie and not by turning over the soil, but by imitating the seeds that fall naturally into the soil.

But his statement, which as I say is so radical, is about his own profession--his profession of farming. And it raises this question in my mind, Hmm, we've been doing agriculture wrong for 10,000 years? Have we been doing education wrong for 10,000 years? Have we been doing economics wrong for 10,000 years? Have we been doing religion wrong for 10,000 years? And business for 10,000 years?

Those are the questions that come to mind when you raise the question that Wes Jackson was applying to his own profession, to his own work. And all this underscores how important our work is, and the context in which we set our work.

Not to buy the bigger picture from Otto Rank but what we're playing with in this meditation is creation itself. As he says, "The epitome of the irrational is the marvel of creation itself." This recovering of the marvelousness of existence of the earth, of the universe, of us being here in this place with all these other beings, to share it with all of them. Marvelous.

Remember that the word "miracle" means marvelous, that which strikes us, to marvel, and to wonder, and to be grateful. And this is the bigger context in which we can ask these questions about our work, and our nationhoods, our citizenship, all the efforts we make in our attempt to survive and to thrive on this planet.

All these questions I think are in the air today, as we face our extinction, vis a vis climate change, and also, vis a vis, our own rage inside that leads to wars and to the deconstructing of democracies.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.