

Mysteries

When I'm less lazy I'll actually look up the quotation, but Einstein (whose writings on metaphysics are at least as instructive – and more accessible – than his writings on physics) once said something like this: It is what we don't know that is more interesting than what we do know. And again something like this: Life would be less without the mysteries.

Well, if he didn't say it, then I will: Life would be less without the mysteries.

Why? Because as long as we can't be absolutely sure about something, our imaginations can roam and roam. And somewhere in there, just possibly, might come a divine inspiration. In that wonderful sea of uncertainty, we can just leave ourselves open to experience, for life living life: the possibilities of joy or love or rapture or ecstasy. Everything is possible if you remain open to it. Nothing is possible if you say it can't be.

And with that intro, to the topics at hand, the mysteries that most fascinate me: Attraction, New Ideas, and Connectivity. The continuing mysteries of life.

So, one by one:

Attraction

How is it that you can be sitting with many people at a party, and suddenly somebody walks into the room, and you look at him or her, and wham! Something happens. You know -- no, you *feel* this gravity towards that person, it's as if you *recognize* that person, you feel attraction. And strangely enough, nobody else in that room is reacting in the same way you are, it is this vibration of ancient sympathies and longings that meet in a millisecond of eye contact, and the room is transformed. If things go right, the two of you will talk. You will talk at first about the blandest of banalities, just to hear the other person's voice, just to sense the rhythms of their movements, the smell of their skin. The brain goes on an automatic pilot of blah, blah while the rest of your body undergoes a chemical reaction, a strip search of the soul.

I'm sure there have been all kinds of scientific studies about the phenomena of sexual attraction between human beings, pheromones and childhood's ideal images meeting from subconscious pools of parental transplants or Jungian archetypes wending their way towards preparing pairings, and all that. But none of that psycho-jabber is reducible to analytic survey. In the end, we pair off as a species out of necessity, but in a blind magic dance, unaware of the sources of our attractions. And how Nature works that miracle remains just that: a miracle. Whether it be a purely sexual one-night stand or the romantic mating for a lifetime, our pairings come from the pulsing rhythms of the Universe recreating itself, in overwhelming waves of desire we can neither fathom nor control.

How that all happens is (thank God!) perhaps the greatest of human mysteries.

New Ideas

Where do they come from? Why should they even happen at all?

Thanks to modern mass communications, we now know that separate groups of people struggling with the same problem can come up with the same or similar solution within hours of each other. Witness the various Nobel Prize awards to scientists that have occurred in recent history, as that team of wizards in England comes up with a breakthrough in science within hours or days of a similar, independently working team in the U.S. It's as if the new idea had to wait to be ripe for that moment.

People of the Baha'i faith believe that God reveals himself in increments over time, that mankind evolves spiritually in the same way that it evolves physically. So when the world is ready for a Moses, it gets a Moses, then a Jesus, then an Einstein, and so on. So it seems to be with a new idea: the world must first be ready for it, then it comes.

The word "inspiration" comes from the Latin *inspirare*, to "breathe in," to take from something outside and make it internal. The Ancient Greek idealists like Plato thought truth was not invented but "discovered," all the verities sitting out there waiting for a taxi, so to speak.

But rightly or wrongly, present Western secular thinking is that an idea originates within a thinker, and if it's good enough, he or she can get a temporary monopoly on the idea called a patent or copyright, so that the thinker can own the idea for a while and maybe even make a pile of money.

Well, whatever it is in the human brain that creates something that was never there before, you have to ask yourself: why *that* person, and why *then*? In the movie *Amadeus*, the pious Salieri, a mediocre composer, has to come to terms with the fact that a ribald, vulgar clown like Mozart has the divine gift of music, it rolls out of him, whereas he, Salieri, must struggle with great effort just to come up with his C- music. Mozart had the ability to compose his music in his head and then write it down in the manner of a stenographer after all the sounds were set in his mind. In a wonderful scene in the movie, Salieri is allowed by Mozart's wife to leaf through folios of a number of Mozart's compositions. Each one, to his amazement and consternation, shows no erasures or crossings out. Each note simply written down perfectly, one after the other, as if dictated by God.

Why should Mozart have this gift, and not Salieri?

But why is it that even Mozart could not have written the music of the Beatles? Or Vivaldi the music of Brahms?

Because the Universe of which we are a part moves to its clock, and all within it move with it. Because the collective soul of mankind has its own timing and logic, and ideas artistic, philosophical or scientific have inevitable moments. We see these patterns only

clearly formed when contemplating the past, often long after they have presented themselves. While they are going on now, though, we usually miss them entirely.

What's the governing principle behind all this? Why can't we predict what tomorrow's new ideas will be? I can only guess, because, after all, this is all, you know, a mystery.

My guess is: God loves surprises.

Connections

Recently, the medical world discovered that single senior citizens who have pets live longer than those who don't. A possible reason for this: petting a cat or dog releases in the brain the same kind of chemicals that joggers become addicted to, endorphins. The result: lowering of blood pressure and a general feeling of well being.

Well, OK, but why?

Is there some primeval survival mechanism built in our genes to pair off, and in turn build families, clans, tribes, villages, cities, nations – and have pets? To look at what has happened to us as a species, the answer has to be yes.

But how do we usually define ourselves? Are we, when alone as isolated cells of bigger organisms, delusional every time we meditate and not in the society of others? At one moment we seem discreet and simple, each of us an individual with anatomical components and distinct boundaries. But we are so clearly linked to others that that is all we usually can say about ourselves: American, wife, mother, daughter, sister, Democrat, Caucasian, college graduate, veteran, speaker of English, and so on: all the things you share with some one or millions of others.

There is that illusion that we all carry around with us, the illusion that this ego is distinct and separate from all others, that that's who we really are, this core is all there is, this "I" we talk to in our head when we're all alone. Put us with others in small groups or a crowd, however, whether at a drunken wedding or a concert or a war or a classroom or a lawsuit or a football game, and whoever it is we think we are disappears into that larger thing, the group dynamic, the body politic.

The unanswered question – and thus the mystery – is whether we are bigger or smaller in social combinations, or when we're alone. Is sainthood to be found after 40 days in the desert, or in washing the feet of the poor?

Can one be both grand and humble?

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There are so many more mysteries than these. But these are definitely my favorites.