

SELF KNOWLEDGE

is not fully possible for human beings. We do not reside in a body, a mind or a world where it is achievable or from the point of being interesting, even desirable. Half of what lies in the heart and mind is potentiality, resides in the darkness of the unspoken and unarticulated and has not yet come into being: this hidden unspoken half will supplant and subvert any present understandings we have about ourselves. Human beings are a frontier between what is known and what is not known. The act of turning any part of the unknown into the known is simply an invitation for an equal measure of the unknown to flow in and reestablish that frontier: to reassert the far horizon of an individual life; to make us what we are – that is - a moving edge between what we know about ourselves and what we are about to become. What we are actually about to become or are afraid of becoming always trumps and rules over what we think we are already.

The hope that a human being can achieve complete honesty and self-knowledge with regard to themselves is a fiction and a chimera, the jargon and goals of a corporate educational system brought to bear on the depths of an identity where the writ of organizing language does not run. Self-knowledge includes the understanding that the self we want to know is about to disappear. What we can understand is the way we occupy this frontier between the known and the unknown, the way we hold the conversation of life, the figure we cut at that edge, but a detailed audit of the self is not possible and diminishes us in the attempt to establish it; we are made on a grander scale, half afraid of ourselves, half in love with immensities beyond any name we can give.

Self-knowledge is often confused with transparency, but knowledge of the self always becomes the understanding of the self as a confluence; a flowing meeting of elements, including all the other innumerable selves in the world, not a set commodity to be unearthed and knocked into shape. Self-knowledge is not clarity or transparency or knowing how everything works, self-knowledge is a fiercely attentive form of humility and thankfulness, a sense of the privilege of a particular form of participation, coming to know the way we hold the conversation of life and perhaps, above all, the miracle that there is a particular something rather than an abstracted nothing and we are a very particular part of that particular something.

What we recognize and applaud as honesty and transparency in an individual is actually the humble demeanor of the apprentice, someone paying extreme attention, to themselves, to others, to life, to the next step, which they may survive or they may not; someone who does not have all the answers but who is attempting to learn what they can, about themselves and those with whom they share the journey, someone like everyone else, wondering what they and their society are about to turn into. We are neither what we think we are nor entirely what we are about to become, we are neither purely individual nor fully a creature of our community, but an act of becoming that can never be held in place by a false form of nomenclature. No matter our need to find a place to stand amidst the onward flow of the world, the real foundation of the self is in the self-forgetfulness that can occur when we meet something other than our reflection.

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