

What is the relation of wonder to being and how does wonder and the throe of inquiry open us to the sacred? What is the problem of truth in this? What is the significance of nothingness as discussed by Dr. Miller in his lecture, his essay (The Way of Suffering) and his book (In the Throe of Wonder) and the relation to the sacred core in each of us. Why is it important for each of us to remain vulnerable at our core/heart to “devastating joy” or to having our everyday world ruptured by wonder? What fears, illusions, and preoccupations prevent us from going toward this core and remaining open?

Wonder is at the very essence of being. To be **[for a human being]** is to interpret, to make meaning of our experiences and the things that surround us. From birth to death, we are constantly in the midst of experiences that shape our perspective, or our meaning of the world **[and all experience is meaningful, that is shaped by the meaning we live in]**. When talking about the “meaning the world” we are not talking about the metaphysics of it. We are not discussing earth, water and wind. We are not discussing why the planet rotates on its axis or what would happen if it stopped. We are talking about something quite contrary to that, something quite greater.

After experiencing an event of wonder or horror, one might say “my world has totally unraveled.” Are they referring to some type of metaphysical unraveling of the earth? Of course not. What they have just experienced totally changed their world because it opened them up to something they had never before known. This is the throe of wonder.

The throe of wonder starts at a young age. Occurrences happen that undoubtedly rupture the world of a child. Perhaps it first occurs when a beloved pet dies. A little child is thrown into the throe of horror as they first experience finitude. Their beloved puppy, whom they thought they would have forever, is now gone. This is “earth shattering.” Or perhaps it occurs when a mother or father leaves the family. The person whom they thought would be their protector and provider forever has left. This again is earth

Comment [dp1]: Wonder is the in between from the ordinary to the unknown other, not the essence of being. The essence of being is its radical otherness and that it can be known as the unknown other, though very few people realize this because they mistake the given as being.

Comment [dp2]: Right for horror that leads to anguish. Wonder, however, opens a new world of meaning. Even horror is an event in my world that still orients me. To say a world has completely unraveled is to say the self for whom that was a world is now destitute and in anguish, has the barest remnant of a world such that all they can experience is such anguish. This state of nothingness, of course, is the prelude to the possibility of awe (not wonder because wonder can only happen within a world). Awe can only happen when the self has been obliterated and has no world, but such awe can then be the prelude to new worlding that is a radical transformation of the self, issues in a radically new type of self that is in the world, but not of the world, lives a much more powerful life far less impeded by what typically impedes one who has not gone through such a radical transformation.

Comment [dp3]: Good example of an early experience of horror... “this can’t be true” kind of experience. But it does not undermine a child’s world, rather it becomes part of the meaning of the world when they incorporate it especially when a parent give some kind of explanation of it. Parents sometimes with the best of intentions give very damaging explanations that give children issues that they will have to deal with and overcome later.

Comment [dp4]: In our terms “world shattering.” (a world of meaning) since earth is a meaning IN our world of meaning, not a world of meaning itself. We do say earth shattering but that is indicative of the myth of the given. Since we are seeing all this in a more adequate way, world shattering is appropriate.

Comment [dp5]: Another good example

shattering. On the other hand, there are experiences that throe us into unexplainable joy, like falling in love for the first time or seeing breath-taking artwork. Every one of these experiences **changes you**.

Comment [dp6]: By changing your world

These experiences of wonder and of horror undeniably point to our finitude, our vulnerability, our lack of control. Many people fear this. In experiencing joy comes the ability to experience sorrow. In loving another person comes the ability to experience loss. And so, one begins to put up walls around themselves to block themselves from experiencing wonder or horror. People want to control every situation in hopes of escaping sorrow, suffering and even death. To do this people will dive into the mundane world. The mundane world is ordinary, filled with tasks, goals and business. Here too are theories and presumptions about how the world works and why it works that way. These theories offer stories that fit into one's neatly constructed world so that people can push aside big questions of meaning and existence. They offer a way for people to stay in their mundane world instead of experiencing the true world of wonder. The mundane world is actually not reality at all. Dr. Miller said, "of all our worlds, the everyday is the closest to being completely dead. (p. 99)" It is not that the mundane world is bad. In fact, one must have the the mundane world. However, the mundane world should not be the place we solely exist in, it should be used to move from and within to the world of wonder.

Comment [dp7]: Nicely done

As a child, one may be thrown into wonder or horror not even as a choice but just as it comes. This is because children have not yet formulated theories, beliefs and perspectives that are so ingrained that they do not allow outside experiences to shape them. As an adult, however, it sometimes takes work or diligence to enter in to the throe

of wonder. This is because, as an adult, people often have the ideas of the mundane world so ingrained that it takes time and labor to sort of “undue” what has been done. To be able to again enter in to the world of wonder, one must strip away his or her prejudices and acknowledge one’s own arrogance, finitude, fallibility and vulnerability. In this there is freedom to experience true joy, magnificence and awe. Yet, there is also the freedom to truly experience horror and suffering. This results in a feeling of deep anguish. Anguish from the resulting rupture. All of sudden, there is a total awareness of one’s limits and bounds. This anguish, however, brings about true humility. Miller describes this experience as the abstract idea of nothingness. He says, “This nothingness which I have spent my life avoiding is the most priceless of gems because, when I finally accept my identity with it, it enables me to experience existence itself as an unspeakable grace (Miller, p. 12).” Miller is saying that in this place of nothingness we are free to see our existence as an incredible gift, not as something to be controlled or to possess.

Comment [dp8]: When it goes all the way to undermining ones world (see comment 2 above)

Comment [dp9]: Distinguish between the experience of the intimation of nothingness (horror) and the experience of nothingness which is not fully an experience because there is no meaningful world in which it occurs. In between these, is the increasing awareness of one’s nothingness that if not fled from moves through an obliteration of the ego and then possibly to the transformation mentioned in comment 2 above.

Being in the throe of wonder and experiencing our own nothingness opens one up to the sacred. In *The Sacred and the Profane*, Eliade says that the sacred is the “manifestation of something of a wholly different order.” Entering in to the sacred allows one to enter into the presence of a greater reality than the ordinary world, one that surpasses the finitude of man. It is impossible for someone to even recognize or, far greater, fall in love with something infinitely greater than themselves if they do not recognize their own finitude. In *The Way of Suffering*, Miller suggests that it is not until one is here, in the midst of their own nothingness, that they can enter into the sacred and fall in love with God. He says, “It is God’s love we have dreaded to find because it

Comment [dp10]: Right. But no so much “in place” of, but “by means of which.” Once one has recognized but not fully experienced this nothingness (since it cannot be fully experienced), this recognition of one’s nothingness informs one entire way of being-in-the-world and is never replaced but is always the means by which the recognition of the gift of existence, which is our way of being, is a completely undeserved gift. It changes the entire way we see and live.

wrests from the deepest part of the self a confession of our poverty, our utter unworthiness to be at all, our nothingness, in and of ourselves, before God created us (p. 9).” One who lives in the world of the mundane may find that to be the most terrifying thought to ever have. But one who seeks to lived in the throe of wonder finds it to be incredibly freeing because they can take part in a journey of radical inquiry and exploration. They understand that they will never arrive at completion or to come to a full and absolute understanding, but instead they have freedom to continually gain wisdom as the ruptures in their world to bring about new meaning and insight.

All humans are finite, all humans are vulnerable, and all humans experiences such events that rupture their the world. The response to that rupture, however, it what sets people apart. It sets apart those who live in the mundane world and try with all their might to escape the rupture from those who accept the rupture and from it move to a new world, a new understanding and a new perspective.

Comments: Good job. Could elaborate a bit on the sacred core of vulnerability and perhaps say something about the constant rupture of temporality that is also constantly covered over with abstract conceptions of time and the ordinary and our theories, all of which are complete fictions or abstractions, though as you point out essential to human life as long as we don't get trapped in them and confuse them for reality, or worse for being. (note that reality and being are not the same thing. Reality is a construction and is knowable. Being is the absolute unknown other of temporality, reality, and the ordinary.

GRADE: A