

Distance management

Distance
as a life-skill metaphor
for engagement/detachment,
immanence/transcendence,
intimacy/formality

In rules-oriented (closed) societies, life is heteronomous ("others" telling you how to think/ behave). In our rights-oriented (open) society, life is largely autonomous ("self"-decisional). The former, by excess of order, submerge the individual & stifle creativity; the latter, by excess of freedom, underguides the individual, who easily falls into confusion/chaos, hindering the emergence of the person. (In the biblical vision of a theonomous ["God"-ruled] society, the virtues of both types of society flourish without the vices of either.)

1 In closed societies, the relative (interpersonal & individual-societal) distances are **assigned**. E.g., no courtship (Keep your distance!), then arranged marriage (Be close!). (Recently, a Druse boy strangled his sister with their computer-cord because she'd been two hours unchaperoned with a male highschool classmate: so he thought to restore the family honor after her loss of virginity. When the autopsy showed she was still a virgin, he went crazy but was not punished: being for the family honor, the death was not a murder.) In our open society, the relative distances are **situational**, contextual, the options up for grabs (i.e., available for individual decision).

2 True decisional freedom demands that the decider, in the decisional process, be aware of the range of distance-options. Some social psychologists--e.g., Erving Goffman (THE PRESENTATION OF THE SELF IN EVERYDAY LIFE, et al)--specialize in studying the closeness/distance factor in human life. It's called the "closeness vs. autonomy" factor in a recent book on the 29 indicators in marriage: the human-potential goal of autonomy is to "become who you really are," & this fights intimacy as goal. So, why not have closeness without intimacy? That was the disastrous body/soul split that began in the late '60s, with Esalen as its highplace. There, in '68, I talked with many lonely souls in bodies not at all lonely: sexual promiscuity cannot satisfy the soul; physical closeness is no substitute for spiritual intimacy. And whole-person (body-&-soul) intimacy is the marital norm, now in our culture rarely achieved because the body is hypertrophied in the interest of pleasure & the soul is hypertrophied in the interest of independence (Gk., "autonomy"). The partners in a good marriage have each the skills of managing closeness/distance, &--paradoxically--each is more one"self" than if unmarried.

3 Men fear closeness because women are better at it, women fear distance because men are better at it; & each sex sins in yielding to the temptation to believe that what it's better at is more important for humanity (a notion as stupid as to imagine one sex is more important than the other). These pathologies are the underside of the glorious potential of love, of which God in his **transcendence** + **immanence** is the Source & Model (one aspect of our being "made in the image of God"). The intrapersonal complementarity of far/near in deity & humanity has its parallel in interpersonal mutuality (trinitarian, divine-human, human-human).

The meanings of the personal (in deity & humanity) are inseparable from the mystery of the personal: the mystery both transcends & illumines the meanings. And sexuality, in its meanings & mystery, serves as a metaphoric bridge between deity & humanity. In the OT, Israel is Yahweh's wife; in the NT, the church is Jesus' bride. Heaven is masculine (Father Sky), earth is feminine (Mother Earth): transcendence is masculine, immanence is feminine. Feminine values are suppressed when religion is too masculine; masculine values are suppressed when the sky falls, transcendence collapsing (as now in most mainline religion) into immanence (God feminized into "Love" or even replaced by the Goddess).

The biblical use of the sexual analogy for deity is clear & consistent. We are to worship neither a divine Couple nor a Goddess, but only God, whose titles & pronouns are masculine & whose character embraces the sexual spectrum (as Jesus' "Father" is both transcendent in power & authority & immanent in love).

4 Paradoxically, the collapse of distance correlates not with intimacy but with indifference. No courtship, no love. No manners, no order. No distance, no friendship: when everybody's a friend, nobody's a friend. Titles maintain distance & first names affirm closeness: e.g., "Pastor John" honors both.