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The Fountainhead of our Being:

Creative Imagination in Jung's Analytical Psychology

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'All that is outside, also is inside,' we could say with Goethe. But this 'inside,' which modern rationalism is so eager to derive from 'outside,' has an *a priori* structure of its own that antedates all conscious experience. It is quite impossible to conceive how 'experience' in the widest sense, or, for that matter, anything psychic, could originate exclusively in the outside world. The psyche is part of the inmost mystery of life, and it has its own peculiar structure and form like every other organism. Whether this psychic structure and its elements, the archetypes, ever 'originated' at all is a metaphysical question and therefore unanswerable. The structure is something given, the precondition that is found to be present in every case. And this is the mother, the matrix--the form into which all experience is poured. (CW 9,i:187)

C.G. Jung

Introduction

Jung's psychology, as the quotation above so eloquently attests, is a radically intrapsychic psychology. In contrast to other psychologies which characterize themselves as intrapsychic, it does not consider psychic contents to be the product of such ontogenetic processes as introjection and repression--or at least not exclusively so. On the contrary, the psyche, as the product of millions of years of evolution, contains formal structures--Jung calls them archetypes--which are the well-springs of the symbolic fantasies through which we perceive the world. In this paper I shall examine in some detail the notion of the psyche as an inner world of fantasy images which is at the same time the source of life and the matrix of the individuation process.

The Primacy of Imagination

...image is psyche....

(Jung CW 13: 75)

In his voluminous writings Jung never tires of articulating his vision of the psyche. The psyche, he repeatedly insists, is a distinct order of reality 'consist[ing] essentially of images' (CW 8: 618). These images, he further specifies, are not 'psychical reflections of external objects,' but rather, 'figure[s] of fantasy or *fantasy-image[s]* [which are] related only indirectly to the perception of an external object' (CW 6:743). This point--that the images of which the psyche consists are *fantasy-images*--is crucial. For the distinctness of the psyche as a reality in its own right and the recognition of the value of the 'inner world' its images present rests upon the recognition of the autonomy and independence of its images from the external world.¹ Far from being spurious, conglomerations of decaying sense impressions as scientific rationalism has errantly assumed, or introjected residues of relationships with outer figures as psychoanalysis has maintained, fantasy-images, like the psyche which they constitute, comprise, in Jung's reckoning, an order of reality which he apostrophizes as 'the greatest of all cosmic wonders' (CW 8:357), 'the world's pivot' (CW 8:423).

The importance which Jung here attributes to the psyche follows from the value he attributes to its fantasies and vice versa. For, just as the proverbial stone which the builders rejected ultimately became the cornerstone of the new temple, Jung's vision of the psyche as 'the greatest of all cosmic wonders,' a vision so new that it has yet to receive the attention which it properly deserves, is founded or pivoted upon a radical re-evaluation of the importance of those spontaneous productions

of imagination which are so readily devalued and discarded as mere or sheer fantasy. In Jung's psychology fantasy is primary. Experientially, phenomenologically, we are `in' imagination, `in' the psyche, `in' fantasy before we are in the outer world. Put another way, the images of the psyche are prior to our conscious experience of the external world and filter our experience of it. It is they that structure perception (Jung uses the term apperception for this process) such that the welter of external impressions receive the ordering necessary for them to be experienced as a world. And it is precisely because `psychic existence is the only category of existence of which we have *immediate knowledge*' (CW 11:769) that its fantasies are the `*sine qua non of the world as an object*' (CW 8:357).

The Well-Spring of Life

... There are very few beings yet capable of making a difference between mental image and the thing itself. This primitivity is poisoning our human world and is so dense a mist that very few people have discovered its existence yet (Jung, 1975).

From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.

John 7:38

In an aphorism titled `And once more Grow Clear,' Nietzsche conveys to his readers a sense of the living reality of the soul by comparing himself, and his readers with him, to an `open fountain which would hinder no one from drinking from [it].' Like an open fountain, however, Nietzsche and we, his readers, `have no means of preventing ourselves being made *turbid* and dark' by passersby,

no means of preventing the age in which we live casting its "up-to-date rubbish" into us, or hindering filthy birds throwing their excrement, the boys their trash, and fatigued resting travellers their misery, great and small, into us. But we do as we have always done: we take whatever is cast into us down into our depths--for we are deep, we do not forget--*and once more grow clear...*(Nietzsche, 1960).

This image of the soul as an open fountain, which, though subject to pollution, can also cleanse itself by drawing fresh water up from its depths, is, I believe, a particularly apt image of what Jung means by the psyche. Though rubbish is thrown into the fountain that we also are--and by rubbish I am thinking of Freud's view of the unconscious as consisting of the repressed excrement of consciousness--more importantly, water flows up from below, for the fountain is also a spring.

Jung, undoubtedly, would amplify the water that springs up from this fountain as 'living water' in the biblical and alchemical senses of that expression. The water that refreshes the open fountain is the *aqua permanens*, the *elixir vitae*, the quintessence of life. Psychologically, this water corresponds to fantasy. 'What we call fantasy,' writes Jung, 'is simply spontaneous psychic activity, and it *wells up* wherever the inhibitive action of the conscious mind abates' (CW 16:125; italics mine). In other places (I will only cite a second), Jung again employs hydraulic metaphors when describing fantasy: 'Fantasy as imaginative activity is identical with the *flow* of psychic energy' (CW 6:722; italics mine).

Although one could imagine any number of images as analogies for the creative, self-generative

life of the psyche (Kugler's spinning top which can throw off perturbations caused by external impingements, the goddess Maya's webs of illusion, and Hesse's glass bead game come immediately to mind)(Kugler & Hillman, 1985), and though any image might in some holographic manner be imagined to be transparent to the imagination as a whole, let us stay with this image of a fountain, the better to grasp the nature of its 'philosophical water.'

What water is to life, fantasy is to the psyche. Fantasy is living water. As such it is the panacea for the dry rationalism that Jung took to be the blight of our age. But where do we find fantasy? How can we drink images? And in what way does drinking the psyche's images refresh our lives?

A young graduate student worked on a hog farm in order to help fund his studies. As time went by he became increasingly exhausted. Though he knew that the farm work was sapping his energy he was reluctant to let the job go. Doubtless, the family values that had been cast into him as into an open fountain played a role here. He was made 'dark and turbid' through his identification with a work ethic that was quite alien to his deeper nature. The more energy he let drain off into this low-wage work, the less of himself he was able to bring to his actual interests. Life, in a word, had become quite stagnant. His dutiful devotion to a job which he fully recognized was of merely a provisional value was cutting him off from the water of life.

Towards the end of his tenure on the farm, the student became subject to a sort of checking compulsion. After he had finished the evening chores, showered and changed his clothes, he would start to question in his mind whether he had turned off the water tap that filled the feeding troughs in the barn. To assuage his gnawing uncertainty, he would then run into the barn, quickly so that his clean clothes wouldn't pick up the stench of manure, and check the tap. Invariably he would find, contrary to the flood he had expected, that the tap was shut off and everything was in order.

Although the young man did not realize it at the time, his worries about leaving the water running and his compulsion to check were symbolical fantasies. The tap that *was* running, the tap that he was not attending to, was not in the barn, but in himself. The unconscious, which as Jung has said, appears first in projection (CW 8:584), was projecting itself upon the actual water faucet in the barn for it apparently had no other means of entering the student's attention which at that time was so galvanized by the outer world. Given that he was allowing his life energy to be unnecessarily dissipated by the farm work, the faucet in the barn was an appropriate 'hook' for the projection of the psyche's view of the situation. The job itself was flotsam in the student's fountain. Not realizing, however, that the worries about the running water were concretized fantasies, not realizing, that is to say, the 'difference between mental image and the thing itself,' he was unable to return his libido to its depths, where it might 'once more grow clear.'

It was not until he was off work with strep-throat that this was able to occur. While convalescing at home, the subject had a dream that inundated him with sufficient imagination to see his situation in its proper perspective. In the dream he returned to work and found the barn completely flooded. Apparently, he had left the water running when he last left work and it continued to run during his time off sick. The water, which was not "dark and turbid," but on the contrary, clean, fresh, and cold had drowned the entire herd of pigs and washed them out of the barn. As he assessed the damage he realized that there was nothing to be done, nothing to be salvaged. The water of life had washed away the structures that had constrained it.² The young student did not return to the farm.³

Doubtless, this fantasy of the water being left running in the barn and the checking compulsion that accompanied it are examples of what Freud has called 'the psychopathology of everyday life.' Viewed in this perspective, they can be accounted for reductively as symptoms of conflict between

id and super-ego, the worry or fear about flooding the barn being a reaction-formation defending the young man's ego against an unconscious destructive wish. From a Jungian point-of-view, however, the psychopathology of everyday life, and indeed, much of psychopathology, is transparent to a religious or spiritual background which corresponds to what Jung, in the quote at the opening of this paper, refers to as the psyche's `a-priori structure ...[which] antedates all conscious experience.' Though Jung does not disregard the importance of recognizing with Freud the pathogenic effects of the repressed material which consciousness has cast into the unconscious as into a fountain, his particular contribution has been the recognition that beside a repressed unconscious there is a vast sphere of the psyche that has never been conscious. From this vast matrix consciousness emerges. From this deep spring the fountain is refreshed and renewed. It is upon this understanding of the psyche that Jung's constructive-synthetic approach to interpretation and his technique of active imagination are based (*CW* 6: 720).⁴

The `Theology' of the Complex

Seek him from out thyself, and learn who it is that taketh possession of everything in thee, saying, *my* god, *my* spirit, *my* understanding, *my* soul, *my* body; and learn whence is sorrow and joy, and love and hate, and waking though one would not, and sleeping though one would not, and getting angry though one would not, and falling in love though one would not. And if thou shouldst closely investigate these things, thou wilt find Him in thyself, the One and the Many, like to that little point, for it is in thee that he hath his origin and his deliverance.

Monoimos (cited in Jung, *CW* 9ii:347)

In answer to the question--why psychology, as an empirical science, has only very recently discovered the unconscious and investigated the archetypal images which present its structure?--

Jung replies that formerly there existed a 'religious formula for everything psychic' (CW 9,i:11). In the light of this remark, it is interesting to note that the same 'disturbances of attention' which Jung, the experimentalist, recognized as indicating the presence of a complex, Jung, the analyst, considered to be the experiential basis of encounter with that central imago of the psyche, which the pious call God.

What some people call instinct or intuition is nothing other than God. God is that voice inside us which tells us what to do and what not to do I make my patients understand that all the things that happen to them against their will are a superior force. They can call it god or devil, and that doesn't matter to me, as long as they realize that it is a superior force. God is nothing more than that superior force in our life. You can experience God every day (Jung, 1980).

The God which Jung made his patients recognize in all events that happened to them against their will corresponds to what in the technical language of analytical psychology is called the archetypal core of the complex. The connection between the complex and the archetype, a connection which Jungian therapy attempts to make vivid through the technique of amplification, is of immense psychotherapeutic importance, for it is precisely this recognition that the complex is created in the image and after the likeness of the archetype which underpins it that facilitates relationship between the ego and the unconscious contents and provides meaning. Expressed in the terms of Nietzsche's fountain metaphor, it is through an *epistrophe* or 'return' to the archetypal images which religions, as 'psychotherapeutic systems in the truest sense of the word, and on the grandest scale' (CW 10:367) enshrine, that we 'once more grow clear.'

Although not itself a religion, analytical psychology recognizes in the forms of religion the lineaments of an objective psyche. The timeless, universally human themes of mythology and

culture, repeated in endless variation throughout the world, provide the metapsychological context of Jung's psychological vision--not a mechanistic hypostasis such as Freud's id, super-ego, and ego.

Of course, as individuals we are for the most part as unconscious of this `universal foundation [from which] no human soul is cut off' (*ibid.*) as the student in our example was when he confused the subtle `water' welling up from the depths of his own soul with the actual water which flowed out of the tap in the barn. Indeed, dissociation from our deep psychic structures is particularly likely given the secular wasteland that we now inhabit. But, as Jung has pointed out, the `unparalleled impoverishment of symbolism' which characterizes our present age" also heralds the `rediscover[y] [of] the gods as psychic factors, that is, as archetypes of the unconscious' (*CW* (9i:50). The individual can still re-connect his or her consciousness to the collective matrix from which it was created and can continue to be sustained, thereby restoring the `great relationship' which Jung identifies as the palliative to the `prime evil of neurosis' (*CW* 10:367).

The Creation of the Individual

The archetype is pure, unvitiated nature, and it is nature that causes man to utter words and perform actions whose meaning is unconscious to him....

(Jung *CW* 8:412)

It is not I who create myself, rather I happen to myself.

(Jung *CW* 11:391)

The individuation of the individual is another central concern of Jung and of subsequent analytical psychology. And here once again, in striking contrast to other psychologies that characterize themselves as intrapsychic, Jung conceives of the uniqueness of the individual as emerging from a psychic matrix which is essentially discontinuous with the external world.

Although identity formation does involve the introjection of relationships with outer figures, though we do take after our mother and father, our friends and mentors, even as they carry or mediate whatever archetypal factors we have unconsciously projected onto them, that uniqueness which is the essence of our individuality springs from another source. This other source, which we have metaphorized as a fountainhead of creative fantasy, is God, or, rather, the 'empirical god-image,' the archetype of the self. As Jung writes,

...The individual will never find the real justification for his existence, and his own spiritual and moral autonomy, anywhere except in an extramundane principle capable of relativizing the overpowering influence of external factors. The individual who is not anchored in God can offer no resistance on his own resources to the physical and moral blandishments of the world. For this he needs the evidence of inner, transcendental experience which alone can protect him from the otherwise inevitable submersion in the mass (*CW* 10:511).

Just as we can experience God every day as the supreme force at work in whatever happens to us against our will, so we can have daily experience of our individuality. The 'inner, transcendental' experience, which Jung identifies as the sole protection of our individual uniqueness, is as near to hand as our next constellated complex--be that a worry, an obsession, or a fantasy about a running tap. The 'psychopathology of everyday life' is the fountainhead of unique being. Though we may create ourselves in the sense of establishing a fixed identity, it is in the way we happen to ourselves that our individuality is revealed to us as the creation of the self. Call it the surrender of the ego to the self. Call it recognition of God. Call it the integrative affirmation of whatever is against our will. It is in precisely this surrender, this recognition, this affirmation, that identity become transparent to our unique individuality, 'the face we had before we were born.' As Jung put it, and with these words we shall have reached our conclusion,

Nowhere are we closer to the sublime secret of all origination than in the recognition of our own selves, whom we always think we know already. Yet we know the immensities of space better than we know our own depths, where--even though we do not understand it--we can listen directly to the throb of creation (CW 8:737).

References

Jung, C.G. (1961). 'Interview with Jung', *Good Housekeeping*, December, quoted in Edward Edinger, *Ego and Archetype*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, p. 101: 'To this day God is the name by which I designate all things which cross my wilful path violently and recklessly, all things which upset my subjective views, plans and intentions and change the course of my life for better or worse.'

_____ (1975). *C.G. Jung Letters. Vol. II*, ed. Gerhard Adler, Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 578.

_____ (1980) *C.G. Jung Speaking: Interviews and Encounters*, ed. William McGuire and R.F.C. Hull, London, Picador, p. 242.

Kugler, P. and Hillman, J. (1985). 'The Autonomous Psyche: A Communication to Goodheart', *Spring*. Dallas: Spring Publications, p. 160.

Nietzsche, F. (1960). *The Joyful Wisdom*, New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, p. 346.

Notes

1. By 'external world' I mean the world as it is perceived by the contemporary rationalistic mind-set as consisting of inert matter.
2. Michael Whan has suggested that I comment on the status of actual, elemental water in light of archetypal psychology's recent concern with the *anima mundi* and James Hillman's concern that psychology's focus on human interiority has dislocated us from a sense of the soulful depths of the actual world. Does treating water as symbolic of an 'inner water' not psychologically nullify elemental water? If, as Coleridge writes in his *Biographia Literaria*, 'objects ([perceived] as objects) are essentially fixed and dead,' is this not precisely because, as Coleridge writes in *Dejection: An Ode*, 'I may not hope from outward forms to win/The passion and the life, whose fountains are within'? Read in alchemical perspective, Coleridge's dichotomy between 'outward forms' that are 'fixed and dead' and the fountains within corresponds to the establishment of the *unio mentalis*, that initial stage of the opus in which the soul is released from 'the chains of Physis...[,] called back by the "counsel of the spirit" from her lostness in matter and the world'(CW 14:673). The subsequent stages of the opus, stages which Hillman appears to be concerned with in recent

years, Jung calls 'the re-uniting of the *unio mentalis* with the body...[,] union with the *undus mundus*' (CW 14:679). Although Hillman affirms the operations of these later stages in his characteristically polemical style, almost turning against the first stage of the opus which he helped to establish in the 1970's and early 80's with his psychology of the image, we need not follow his *stylistic* excess and devalue the former in order to lay hold of the latter. The establishment of the *unio mentalis*--the student's recognition of the 'inner water'--far from robbing the splendour of the *anima mundi* for the aggrandizement of human interiority, becomes the organ of perception proper to the *anima mundi*. 'A materialist view of the world ill accords with the reality and autonomy of the psyche,' writes Jung (CW 14:673). It is precisely that 'inner water' of withdrawn projections which, paraphrasing Blake, 'clean[es] the doors of perception' such that 'every thing appears to man as it is, infinite.' Once the student had grasped the symbolic aspect of water, his sense of its elemental reality was no longer attenuated by its previous agricultural applications. As Blake put it, 'the cistern contains: the fountain overflows.'

3. While I was thinking about this metaphor of the fountain as a metaphor of the fecundity of the psyche my thirteen-old-son, quite synchronistically, employed a similar metaphor. Differentiating himself from an expectation that I had of him, he expressed his reluctance to oblige by saying very sincerely that "the trickle deep at the bottom of a well which is, like, inside me just doesn't flow that way." My expectations, though not wholly unreasonable, were, he was telling me, trash in his fountain. Like, Nietzsche, he was taking my suggestions deep into himself, not that he might lose himself in identifying with them, but that he might "once more grow clear."

4. The purposive view of fantasy is fundamental to constructive-synthetic interpretation. Viewed purposively, any image becomes a well-spring of imagination and possibility. As Jung writes, 'Causally interpreted, [a fantasy] seems like a *symptom* of a physiological or personal state, the outcome of antecedent events. Purposively interpreted, it seems like a *symbol*, seeking to characterize a definite goal with the help of the material at hand, or trace out a line of future psychological development' (CW 6:720).