

Response to Wolfgang Giegerich's 'Reflections On Today's Magnum Opus of the Soul

Greg Mogenson

In his essay, "The Opposition of 'Individual' and 'Collective'--Psychology's Basic Fault: Reflections On Today's Magnum Opus of the Soul," Wolfgang Giegerich challenges Analytical Psychology to take a particularly bitter dose of its own medicine. Like the patient who dreamt of Jung telling her she must go "not out, but through" the pit of hot material in which she was submerged, Analytical Psychology, in Giegerich's view, must go "not out, but through" the very realities of contemporary life that so threaten its present understanding of the soul. "Globalization," "Down-sizing," "Profit Maximization"--these for Giegerich are the spirits at play behind what is really going on in the world today, the hot material in which we are mired. Can we relinquish our defensive use of Jungian categories and with a courage similar to that which Jung drew upon when he let himself drop through his study floor, there to confront the denizens of his own depths, let ourselves drop into the grip of these powers? Or, more precisely, can we squarely and unequivocally face the fact that we have already been felled by these powers and start from there?

In an interview given in the 1950's, Jung, speaking not as a theologian but as a psychologist (even though he drew upon the language of the theologian in characterizing the unconscious), identifies God as whatever happens to us against our will:

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.

Giegerich's article contemporizes this rather traumatic conception of God. The radical edge of this contemporization resides in his claim that God no longer merely crosses and upsets our wilful aims and intentions, but has actually revoked our very significance as individual agents. The sense of personal meaninglessness which Jung long ago recognized as the malaise afflicting modern man and fought to change, Giegerich, would have us embrace as necessary. The soul, in his view, is no longer located in the individual, but in the very forces that have ended its habitation there. Though we may still be modern men and women in search of a soul, we can no longer seek the soul in the places Jung directed us to search--our inner experience as individuals, dreams and meditation. To do so would be to seek a way *out* when the only legitimate path is *through*. "In such a context," writes Giegerich,

where the very goal of the process we find ourselves in is objectively to render the human being, and individual identity as such, metaphysically or logically redundant, the process of individuation has no place. To continue to advocate it is the wrong move. It entirely misses the point. The process of individuation is totally disconnected from what is really going on. Not individuation, but *globalization*, is the soul's magnum opus today. And globalization means the elimination of personal identity as something in its own right and the logical subjugation of everything individual under the one great abstract goal of profit maximization: profit must

increase, but I must decrease. (p.17)

Giegerich argues that we in psychology must analyze what is going on, rather than decry, oppose, or attempt to treat it. By going with the pathologizing process which is currently annihilating individual identity, analytical psychology, he suggests, might finally pass through the problematic of our age and win for itself the right to bear witness to the objective psyche.

As the human being is dethroned from the central place around which psychological life allegedly has to revolve, the psyche can finally in truth be recognized as what Jung tried to see it: as objective or autonomous psyche, or as I would prefer to say, as the logical life of the soul, a life that is its own (even though it lives through us and needs us to give expression to it). (p. 24)

Giegerich, I believe, does us a service by describing our current situation in such a disturbing manner that we are compelled to suffer it without the consolations of our usual philosophy. In arguing that the individual is obsolete and that the individuation process has become an irrelevant anachronism, he gives content to the age-old adage, "It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Yes, it is a terrible thing, as terrible as down-sizing, MacJob, and the dehumanizing economic forces associated with globalization.

But is the individual truly as irrelevant as Giegerich claims, or is the recognition of all that now threatens to make it so the bitter dose of medicine we must take in order to feel called to the psyche's greater work once more? Though Giegerich would like to save the phenomena which currently afflicts us from our efforts to cure or ameliorate it, is it perhaps more truly the case that we simply (and, of course, not so simply) need to add more arsenic to the pharmakon of analytical psychology? A drop or two of utter poison may well be necessary to lower the immune system of a discipline that has gotten too decadently healthy on its tonic of psycho-spiritual platitudes. Wounding it by the age we are presently in, how better to reconstellate the wounded healer in its depths?

Having stated what I think is valuable about Giegerich's article, I will now take issue with him on several points.

(1) My main point of criticism is his identification of the powers and principalities that are operative in the world with an objective psyche which is conceived of as excluding the individual as a inherent feature of it. Archetypes, for Jung, are not limited to the psyche, but manifest ubiquitously in other realms as well. Globalization, Down-sizing, and Profit Maximization, as determinate force in our world today, may rightly be called Gods. In my opinion, however, they are titanic divinities, owing to insufficient psychization. Yes, they are dreadfully inhuman, the more so because we do not yet know how to inhabit them. Psyche's fane has yet to be built in these untrodden regions of the mind.

In numerous places in his writings Jung portrays the psyche as having a discontinuous or asymmetrical relationship to the world it mirrors.

It is not the world as we know it that speaks out of his unconscious, but the unknown world of the psyche, of which we know that it mirrors our empirical world

only in part, and that, for the other part, it moulds this empirical world in accordance with its own psychic assumptions. The archetype does not proceed from physical facts, but describes how the psyche experiences the physical fact, and in so doing the psyche often behaves so autocratically that it denies tangible reality or makes statements that fly in the face of it.

(CW 9, i.: 260)

I cite this passage to help make the point that the psyche, even though it may appear first in projection in the determinate forces which revolutionize our lives, is a reality in its own right, distinguishable, at latter stages of consciousness, from the objects that mediate the recognition of its objectivity at any given time. In addition to the strange manners which it, like Yeats' "rough beast," creates for itself in the form of Down-sizing and Profit Maximization, the objective psyche is also manifest in the capacity of the individual to image reality and grapple with it. In the last passage from Giegerich's article cited above, he seems to acknowledge this when he adds to his statement about the psyche having a life of its own the parenthetical qualification—"(even though it lives through us and needs us to give expression to it)".

Another passage from Jung:

It is not storms, not thunder and lightning...that remain as images in the psyche, but the fantasies caused by the affects they arouse. ... Man's curses against devastating thunderstorms, his terror of the unchained elements--these affects anthropomorphize the passion of nature, and the purely physical element becomes an angry god.

Like the physical condition of his environment, the physiological conditions, glandular secretions, etc., also can arouse fantasies charged with affect. Sexuality appears as a god of fertility...or as a terrifying serpent that squeezes its victim to death.

(CW 8: 331-332)

Just as the psyche bears witness to its relative autonomy by registering both the physical conditions of the environment and the physiological processes of the body in the form of images expressive of its own nature, so, too, we may expect it to form fantasies in relation to the affects which are aroused by such vicissitudes of our social, economic, and political environment as Down-sizing, Globalization, and Profit Maximization. These very names, in fact, are themselves primitive (i.e, early, provisional) attempts by the psyche, *through its organ of finitude, the individual*, to imagine the factors that storm, thunder, and impinge as bolts of lightning upon it in our day. And so too are the efforts, decried by Giegerich, to re-ensoul the world with *anima mundi* and a new cosmology. Though by no means immune to the criticism he brings to bear upon them, these efforts may also be viewed as indicative of the fact that "the psyche often behaves so autocratically that it denies tangible reality or makes statements that fly in the face of it." To my mind, the *magnum opus* of any age is to fathom and consciously participate in the symbolic life which the psyche makes possible through its autocratic responses to the traumas of the Real with which it is in dialectical (Jung would say, compensatory) relationship. The individuation process, far from being an anachronism as Giegerich claims, continues to be the psyche's logical response to the forces in the world that would disenfranchise the individual. Giegerich's pronouncement that it is defunct I

would compare to the buddhist priest's telling the dead that they are dead before leading them through the *bardo* to rebirth.

(2) Giegerich re-tells Jung's story of the African medicine man who no longer had big dreams (the kind that oriented his people, telling them where to hunt and other vital information) now that he and they were subject to the District Commissioner and under British rule. Contemporizing the malaise of this chief and making it ours, Giegerich writes that we in the West are in precisely this position with respect of our traditional sources of soul-making. "Inspiration," he writes, "no longer comes from inside," not even an inside such as Hillman offers with his de-literalized version of interiority, "but from outside," which is to say, from the power structures of contemporary life. But is this truly so? Have technology, the computer, and the various geo-political forces really outstripped the psyche's capacity to assert its autonomy by symbolizing these in its own terms? Are we really in a time when our young men will no longer dream dreams, our old men see visions? I think that Giegerich's own article belies this possibility. It has never been claimed that every Tom, Dick, or Harry has big dreams or a call to the *magnum opus* of the soul. Big dreams are the prerogative of the chiefs. Giegerich, though he may squirm to be so characterized, is a chief of our tribe. Hillman has lionized him as the most important thinker in Jungian psychology today. Just as the chief of an indigenous people was once inspired in his leadership by dreams informative of the forces at play in the life of his tribe, Giegerich's article provides guidance and direction to analytical psychology in relation to the forces of contemporary life it imaginatively perceives. The present on-line discussion, in fact, is dedicated to the wider theme of sorting out the future of analytical psychology for the next century.

(3) Where Jung saw individuality as a crucial feature of the soul's logical life, potent enough to occasionally raise the moral level of the collective, Giegerich sees it as logically defunct in our present world. The process that currently determines our lives, he writes,

is not the evil doing of individual managers. It is nobody's fault. It is a development that engulfs us with compelling necessity and has to be likened more to an elementary force of nature than to a deliberate human act.

While Giegerich, as I have already argued, here displays something of the imaginal acuity or shamanic consciousness which is needed in every age to show us what we are in, his claim that it is nobody's fault reads like an endorsement of the banality of evil. Everybody is just following orders, part of the great machine. But could the shamanic consciousness Giegerich's article displays, with its power to picture the "unthought knows" which are engulfing us, not reinstate and empower us as individuals in "laying [our] infinitesimal grain in the scales of humanity's soul" (CW 16:449)? Is it not the *magnum opus* of any age to provide such an empowering vision? Individuation, for Jung, comprises a process of differentiating oneself from archetypes. Seeing the collective psychology in which we are immersed is the first step in going "not out, but through" the trials and tribulations of our time as individuals. Perhaps, the distinction between individual and collective is not at fault after all.

In his openness to giving hospitality to the gods in this ungodly age, Giegerich is more like the Jung who naively gave too much credence to National Socialism in its early days than the Jung who

later wrestled with the dark side of God in *Answer to Job*. Perhaps, however, this is just what Giegerich's "not out, but through" (profoundly enough) intends. The right ideas, he says, cannot simply be ascribed to; they must be "objectively acquired through a slow process of painful experiences"—"learned the hard way" (p. 27). Like those Gnostics who held that you can't be redeemed from a sin you have not committed, Giegerich would have us drink the cup of our own collectivization and individual nullity to its very dregs. While I do think that he makes an important point here, I nevertheless remain even more convinced that the passionate plea Jung makes on behalf of the individual in *The Undiscovered Self*, that late work in which he states that "the salvation of the world consists in the salvation of the individual soul" (CW 10:536), is no less pertinent today than when he originally made it. To say that the situation we find ourselves in is "nobody's fault" is to say, as well, that it is everybody's fault. This "everybody" which we also are is the negative or dark side of the Self which we, as individuals, must struggle to differentiate and redeem.