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NEW POLYTHEISM AND JAMES HILLMAN'S ARCHETYPAL PSYCHOLOGY

Our modern understanding of psyche or soul has been enhanced by the post-Jungian school of Archetypal Psychology founded by James Hillman and his colleagues. Hillman expounded his theories at the Eranos conferences during the seventies, in lectures such as the Terry Lectures at Yale University, in 1972, and in articles and books.

Briefly stated, Archetypal Psychology is a new school of psychology, an approach which stresses art, culture, the history of ideas, and other areas of the humanities. Hillman traces a tradition from Heraclitus and Plato through the Renaissance to the Romantics and Freud and Jung. Although Archetypal Psychology is a psychotherapy, its chief import is possibly the useful perspectives it offers for the interpretation of symbol and myth. Archetypal Psychology is consequently of interest to the historian of religion.

Hillman's concept of *archetype* differs from Jung's very profoundly and is quite close to that of Northrop Frye and the archetypal school of literary criticism. Whereas Jung interpreted *archetype* as a collectively unconscious inherited dynamic tendency which gives rise to symbols and mythologems in the conscious mind, Hillman interprets *archetype* as conscious imagery and idea and does not attempt to account for their unconscious origin.¹ For this reason, his departure from Jung is so very radical that Archetypal Psychology can scarcely be classified as a revisionist school of Analytic Psychology. It is psychodynamic but focuses on what Hillman calls "imaginal" experience. This term was adopted from the late Henri Corbin, a French Islamic scholar, whom Hillman much admires. Corbin identified the archetypes as fundamental structures of imagination or, as he preferred to call them "the imaginal", meaning *imagery*. Both Corbin and Hillman

1. James Hillman, *Re-visioning Psychology*, (New York : Harper Colophon Books, 1975), p. xi.

trace the origins of their interpretation to Heraclitus who, according to Hillman, was the earliest "to take psyche as his archetypal first principle, to imagine soul in terms of flux and to speak of its depths without measure."²

As Hillman puts it: "All depth psychologies have been summed up by the fragment of Heraclitus: 'You could not discover the limits of the soul (psyche), even if you travelled every road to do so; such is the depth (bathun) of its meaning (logos). Ever since Heraclitus brought soul and depth together in one formulation, the dimension of the soul is depth (not breadth in height) and the dimension of our soul is downward'³ Hillman faults Jung for his dependence on Kant, his attempts to find scientific proofs for his theories of archetype and collective unconscious. According to Hillman, there is no way to account for the origins of archetypes. They must be accepted as given. The "imaginal", *mundus archetypalis* and *mundus imaginalis*, as Corbin showed, first presents itself as images in the imagination. We cannot go behind these images to their origins.⁴ At the same time, Hillman does not deny that such origins exist. He repudiates behaviorism, reductionism, and positivism. It is rather that too little can be said with confidence concerning the biological, instinctual, and psychic roots of the archetypes to make such discussion fruitful. It is a question of emphasis and perspective.

As Hillman says, he offers both a way into Jung and out of him. Of the archetypes Hillman writes: "Let us then imagine archetypes as the deepest patterns of *psychic functioning*, the roots of the soul governing the perspectives we have of ourselves and the world. They are the axiomatic, self-evident images to which psychic life and our theories about it ever return. They are similar to other axiomatic first principles, the models or paradigms, that we find in other fields."⁵ Thus, "All ways of speaking of archetypes are translations from one metaphor to another. Even sober operational definitions in the language or science or logic are no less metaphorical than an image which presents the archetypes as root ideas, psychic organs, figures of myths, typical styles of existence or dominant fantasies that govern consciousness." Hillman holds that the archetypes are the gods.⁶ In the course of his seminars and lectures and Syracuse University

2. *Ibid.*

3. Hillman, "Why 'Archetypal Psychology'?" *Spring, 1970.*, pp. 146-65.

4. Hillman, *Archetypal Psychology*, Dallas, Texas: Spring Publications. 1983., p. 4.; cf. also Henri Corbin, *En Islam Iranien*, 4 vols., Gallimard, 1971-1973.

5. Hillman, *Archetypal Psychology*, p. 4.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

during the seventies, Hillman contrasted the Cis-Alpine, Mediterranean Classical tradition with the Trans-Alpine Germanic Romantic tradition. According to him, Jungianism emerges from the intellectual and cultural context of Eckhardt, Boehme, Kant, Goethe, Schopenhauer, Carus, Von Hartmann, and Nietzsche. He prefers the Hellenic, Hellenistic, and Latin context instead, and the tradition of Heraclitus, Plato, Plotinus, Ficino, and Vico. He suggests that this tradition presents the notion of soul as first principle, "placing soul as a *tertium* between the perspectives of body (matter, nature, empirics) and of mind (spirit, logic, idea)."⁷

Hillman contends that a schism of soul occurred during the Eighth General Council at Constantinople in 869 A.D. in which the patriarch Photius was deposed. It marks the beginning of schism between the Greek and Latin Churches. Hillman and his colleagues assert that mind/body dualism emerged at this point of time rather than during the Seventeenth Century with the appearance of Descartes. "Consequences of this dualistic division are still being felt in that the psyche has become indistinguishable from bodily life, on the one hand, and from the life of the spirit on the other."⁸

Hillman's point is that with the schism which divided Greek Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, the West lost perspective and became prone either to mysticism or materialism. He notes that many who regret this dualism turn to the Eastern Religions but sees no solution for the West in this approach. He is repelled by monism and the swallowing up of the concrete and individual in the whole. True, Westerners enamoured of Eastern Religions create their own Western versions. They are not the genuine thing. He also rejects Protestantism which, in his view, exalts monotheism and enhances mind/body dualism. He is drawn instead to Catholic tradition which is emergent from Southern or Mediterranean polytheism. To quote Robert Avens, who shares Hillman's outlook: "I take the view that imagination is the common ground of both Eastern and Western spiritualities in their most diverse manifestations insofar as their professed aim is to transcend all duality. By transcendence I do not mean going beyond duality in the direction of oneness and unity nor any other sort of 'wholing' but rather an awareness of the essential polycentricity of life-seeing ontological

7. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

8. Corbin, "*Mundus Imaginalis or The Imaginary and the Imaginal*", Spring, 1972., p. 15; "*The Imago Templi and Secular Norms*," Spring, 1975., p. 165., p. 8.

value in the *absence* of 'eternal' values and principles. For I am convinced that there is no other way of being human and free.⁹ "An image always seems more profound (archetypal), more powerful (potential), and more beautiful (theophanic) than the comprehension of it, hence the feeling, while recording a dream of seeing through a glass darkly".¹⁰

Archetypal Psychology uses myth as its primary rhetoric. In doing so, it aims at the re-mythologizing of consciousness and of restoring the connections between the rational/empirical and metaphorical.¹¹ Thus, "The tradition of thought (Greek, Renaissance, Romantic) to which archetypal psychology claims it is an heir to is set in polytheistic attitudes." A particularly interesting feature of Archetypal Psychology is its philosophical argument for polytheism. It is, indeed, sometimes referred to as the New Polytheism, but only in the symbolic sense. Hillman and his associates do not affirm the objective reality of the gods but rather find them useful as metaphors and symbols. From Hillman's point of view, polytheism is an avowal of pluralism and diversity which he champions in opposition to monism or monotheism. From this point of view, Archetypal Psychology emphasizes individuality and diversity rather than the submergence of separate selves in a greater Self or submission of selves to a Supreme Self. This approach is rooted both in Freud and Jung. Hillman adopts the Freudian notion of the polymorphic, polycentric, and polyvalent erogenous zones of the child. From Jung he adopts the idea of multiple model personality. Hence, "the soul's inherent multiplicity demands a theological fantasy of equal differentiation."¹² Hillman's attack against Judaeo-Christian monotheism is not that it is an illusion, as Freud contended, or that it is one-sided, as Jung maintained, but rather that the monotheistic fantasy, as he terms it, discourages the free, individual exercise of imaginal faculties on which civilization ultimately depends.

According to Avens, "polytheistic thinking abolishes the boundary between a transcendent God and a secular world, between the divine and the human, the subjective and the objective." It is not that the gods are "out there" or "in here" but that, psychologically speaking, the gods are symbols. While, religiously speaking, the gods were theological substances,

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9. Robert Avens, *Imagination is Reality, Western Nirvana in Jung, Hillman, Barfield, and Cassirer*, (Texas : Spring Publications, 1980). p. 9.
 10. Hillman, *Archetypal Psychology*, p. 6.
 11. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
 12. Hillman, *Loose Ends : Primary Papers in Archetypal Psychology*, Zurich ; Spring Publications, 1975., p. 2.

in archetypal psychology they are metaphors for various modes of experience. They are cosmic perspectives in which the soul participates.¹³

David Miller identifies the Archetypal school with the God is Dead movement in the tradition of Nietzsche. It is a protest against monotheistic thinking and its implied authoritarianism. Thus, "The announcement of the death of God was the obituary of a useless single-minded and one-dimensional norm of civilization that has been predominantly monotheistic, not only in its religion, but also in its politics, its history, its social order, its ethics, and its psychology. When released from the tyrannical imperialism of monotheism by the death of God, man has the opportunity of discovering new dimensions hidden in the depths of reality's history. He may discover a new freedom to acknowledge variousness and many-sidedness. He may find, as if for the first time, a new potency to create imaginatively his hopes and desires, his laws and pleasures."¹⁴

As Miller points out, Nietzsche's message in *Dafur Sprach Zarathustra* was a protest against monolithic thinking. Remove monotheism, and polytheism appears. With polytheism comes pluralistic thinking.

Hillman, Avens, and Miller, and other members of the school of Archetypal Psychology are attuned to the liberal mood of the late sixties and early seventies in America. It has social, political, and religious implications in its emphasis on the concrete, particular experiences of the individual. What is also of interest is the revival of a debate which has not been heard since Late Classical times, the intellectual apologia for polytheism. Hillman is a latter-day Julian the Apostate in his identification of monism with depersonalized abstraction, monotheism with authoritarianism, and polytheism with intellectual and spiritual freedom. It has become axiomatic in the West to consider monotheism the ultimate, and, with it, the authoritarian doctrine of the "one way" in morality and life-style. In Late Classical times, philosophical opponents of monotheism were chiefly repelled by its symbolic implications. Many disbelieved in the substantive and objective reality of all deities but found polytheism congenial in its pluralism. The same is true of the school of Archetypal Psychology today as they attempt to go beyond the bleakness of agnosticism to the emotional and aesthetic richness of religious symbolism and, at the same time, preserve

13. Hillman, *Revisiting Psychology*, (New York ; Harper & Row, 1975), p. 167.

14. Avens, *Imagination is Reality*, p. 93.

freedom. The very fact that the school of Archetypal Psychology is wholly out of step with the authoritarian monotheism of the present conservative decade is also significant. Little is heard of the Archetypal Psychologists. They are dismissed as eccentrics by the few who have heard of them. Should however, the pendulum swings of history produce a revival of liberalism in the next decade, we may well hear more of them. One could compare Hillman with Marcuse whose *Eros and Civilization* was largely ignored when it appeared during the late fifties but devoured during the sixties when its author became the philosopher of the New Left. New Polytheism may do for the nineties what the God is Dead movement did for the sixties.