

WEAVING VOICES

Theme for November 2010

As you may remember our theme for the second half of the year is:

soul

In September, I presented three phenomenological distinctions concerning soul i.e. three ways that we can (or did at one time) experience soul processes. These distinctions have been brought forward by Wolfgang Giegerich in his book, *Soul Violence*. Here they are again:

We must distinguish three meanings of “psychology”: first, psychology in the substantial sense as explicit contents (ideas about the psyche); second, psychology as a style, i.e., as the mode of a soulful response to the world in accordance with the eternal mythologizing activity of the psyche and its imaginal life; and third, psychology as a logical status or a whole level of consciousness.

Last month I gave an example of the second meaning and this month we will explore the third and final meaning:

The first, “substantial sense”

In a substantial sense, as a body of explicit ideas about the soul, its workings, its nature, its pre-existence and fate after death, etc., psychology can be said to have existed during all ages. Even very archaic societies seem to have had a rich psychology in this sense, perhaps a richer, deeper, and more differentiated one than ours, if we think, for example, of the shamanic cultures. And of course, metaphysics and all religions have also developed doctrines about the soul.

The second, “soulful response” sense

Then, as the second meaning of psychology, there is psychology in that sense in which Jung, for example, interpreted alchemy against its own self-understanding as a psychology. Overtly, the alchemists were talking about and working with chemical substances and their processes. But in consciously focusing on those substances in the material world, so Jung’s argument goes, they actually, although mostly unwittingly, were giving expression to soul processes. In the same way, much of all mythology, of ancient and medieval astronomy, biology, anatomy, (ancient) economics, political theory, etc. can be seen as the psychology of our forefathers. They were talking, not explicitly about the soul, but about the stars and the universe, plants and the parts of the human body, householding and the state, chemical substances and philosophical problems—but in all this, psychology happened inasmuch as it was the soul that was speaking here to itself about itself through what they were saying about those subjects. This is a hidden, non-explicit psychology: the soul’s self-display, her self-presentation of her logos by way of metaphor and “speculation.”

The third, “discovery of the soul as ‘subject’”

The third meaning of psychology is divided from the first two (which are closely related) by a hiatus. It did not exist during all ages, but arose only, after centuries of transition, in the post-medieval era and as such is relative to that period—or perhaps relative only to modernity (the time since the early 19th century). It is, as it were, the synthesis of the first two notions: the same process of the soul’s speaking to itself about itself (= second meaning of “psychology”), but now no longer as the soul’s innocent self-display and her self-indulgence in her speculative self-projection, but as the conscious recognition that the soul (the so-called unconscious) is the subject or agent or author behind such self-display. This recognition finds expression in the establishment of a regular scientific discipline called psychology—with which we return to the first (“substantial”) sense of the word “psychology,” but now on a very new level. Now anything human can be suspected of being “psychological,” having unconscious psychological motivations or complications.

Giegerich: Soul Violence, 79ff

Let's begin with a quote from Jung:

No culture before ours was ever forced to take this soul background as such seriously. Always the soul was merely a part of a metaphysical system. But modern consciousness can no longer resist the knowledge that there is a soul.... This distinguishes our time from all others (CW 10: §161)

This quote first of all shows Jung's genius: He was attuned to the "spirit of our times" (see his *Red Book*) so deeply that he apprehended the objective condition of our times and was able to place this condition in its historical context ("no culture before ours..."). But what does Jung mean by "soul background as such"? We need to do a little (very brief) history here...

During the Shamanic/Mythic/ Ritual times our mode of being was immersion in "nature" as is well known. Why then the quotes: "nature"? This is because even then we were immersed in the soul, *as reflected in nature* (without the quotes). Nature (without the quotes) is the realm of the animals, for whom nature is immediate and compelling. For us humans, nature became the medium for the soul's expression, giving rise to our humanness as soul and spirit beings, and drawing us into participation in its mysteries (gods, demons, *otherness*...). It was a time of *innocence* in that we understood ourselves to be immersed in and subject to the compelling gaze of "nature" in its divinity, numinosity, terror etc. The soul had not yet withdrawn from nature so we could not in our thinking, conceive of soul reflecting itself in nature. We could only think: NATURE! In other words, we related *innocently* to the divinity of nature without making the distinction between soul and nature.

Now we can make this distinction as I have just done now. Historically over thousands of years the soul has slowly withdrawn from nature *as the medium in which to reflect itself*, depleting nature of its former glory in the process.

For centuries the soul engaged in progressive acts of violence towards its own innocent being (acted out on the world stage in human acts of destruction, war, heresies, crusades etc. In this way it slowly gained a status of external reflection, knowledge over and against nature, which in turn sank into its present status of exploitable resources. The soul departed from the world at which time psychology became a possibility with its notion of the *unconscious* psyche, etc.

With the birth of psychology, for the first time in history it became possible for the soul to become conscious of itself *as such*, no longer mirroring itself in nature, or in substantiated image (God, Heaven etc., metaphysical thinking, i.e. image as a substance).

What is the status of the soul when it succeeds in distilling itself out of any substantial form in which to mirror itself? Jung named this essence as Mercurius, from his alchemical studies. It is Mercurius

that is released from the substance of alchemical image and thus can no longer be an image (although the alchemists did describe Mercurius in image form).

Here we enter Jung's notion of the Self. Unfortunately because Jung was a child of this times and sought to make his psychology into a respectable science, like other sciences, he muddied his original experience of the Self (see *Travels in Africa* in MDR), by "stuffing" his notion of the Self into the empirical human being ("my" Self). But his discovery of the Self was in fact his thinking the thought of the soul as it came into its own discovery of itself as a self i.e. *as such*!

For the first time in history, the soul came to know itself - "self-conscious" - through the vehicle of the man, Jung.

Jung thought the thought of the Self which in turn thought itself out in the man Jung! While being an ordinary man on the earth, in his ordinariness, Jung rose up in his thinking to think the thought of the soul as it worked out its notion of selfhood, a contradictory notion that unites and separates the ordinary human with the living thinking of the soul.

Now for the first time in history we humans have reached a status of consciousness such that we can grasp the knowledge that we are inextricably surrounded by soul, *as such* i.e. no longer mirrored in any substantial form.

We therefore have the capacity *in potentia* to be sure, to grasp the nature of soul *as such*, a living fluidity!

Where would we look to find soul as it comes into its own, its true nature as living fluidity, or sheer movement? We look where we have always looked to find soul, into the world that we inhabit and which surrounds us on all sides. But what world is that? Certainly no longer the world of nature!

That is over. Instead we must look into the world we have brought into existence through thinking the thought of the soul – our technological civilization! If we do that we can see where sheer fluidity is coming into existence in that world, in a highly positivized form to be sure but a definite hint of the movement of soul: we think of how Money is now circulating the world 24 hours a day and now has moved beyond any substantial form. We can see how process thinking is dominant over content thinking, how surfing is a new cultural form on the Internet and so on.

From these hints we can begin to recognize (or cognize for the first time) that the soul is *the subject or agent or author behind such self-display*.

So, this much for now. See you next year!

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