



Becoming

An Introduction to Jung's
Concept of Individuation

Deldon Anne McNeely

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Preface

Becoming reflects my hope to leave my grandchildren and others of their generation an understanding of the ideas of Carl Gustav Jung. His idea of a process called individuation has sustained my dedication to my lifelong work of psychoanalysis, and it saddens me that the principles that guided me have been dismissed by the current trends in psychology and psychiatry.

We psychotherapists know the value of Jung's approach through clinical results, that is, watching people enlarge their consciousness and change their attitudes and behavior, transforming their suffering into psychological well-being.

Psychology's fascination with behavioral techniques, made necessary by financial concerns and promoted by insurance companies and pharmaceutical companies, has changed the nature of psychotherapy and has attempted to dismiss the wisdom of Jung and other pioneers of the territory of the unconscious mind. We psychoanalysts have played a part in the loss by not transmitting our message clearly. For a combination of unfortunate circumstances, many of the younger generation, including college and medical students, are deprived of fully understanding their own minds. Those with a scientific bent are sometimes turned away from self-reflection by the suggestion that unconscious processes are metaphysical mumbo-jumbo. Superficial assessments of Jung have led to the incorrect conclusion that one must be a spiritual seeker, or religious, in order to follow Jung's ideas about personality. I would like to correct that impression.

Some university professors tell me that they are not allowed to teach Jungian psychology. Secular humanism and positivism have shaped the academic worldview; therefore, investigation into the unknown or unfamiliar dimensions of human experience is not valued. But this attitude contrasts with the positive reputation Jung enjoys among therapists, artists of all types, and philosophers. Those without resistance to the unconscious because of their creativity, open-mindedness, or personal disposition are more likely to receive Jung's explorations without prejudice or ideological resistance. There is a lively conversation going on about Jung's ideas in journals and conferences among diverse groups of thinkers which does not reach mainstream psychology.

Becoming is for those whose minds are receptive to the unknown, and I hope it will help some of us to think—more with respect than dread—of the possibility that we act unconsciously.

In organizing this book, I wanted to prepare for understanding “individuation” by identifying the historical and philosophical contexts in which Jung was situated, and then addressing the question of where this approach fits with the cultural issues of today. If we were reading this as a play, Part I would set the stage and introduce the main characters. Part II describes the action of individuation as it presents itself on the current cultural stage. Part III is like director’s notes for those who have curiosity for more discussion; it amplifies the basic ideas in each chapter and is called “Lagniappe.” This term, common in Louisiana, means you will get a little something extra, like a thirteenth donut when buying a dozen. It is not necessary to read Part III in order to understand why I find the concept of individuation important for each of us, but it is a little something extra that some may enjoy.

Contents

PREFACE	v
Part I INTRODUCTION	1
1. A Question of Principle	3
2. Avoiding Recipes, Accepting Responsibility	6
3. Reality of the Psyche	14
4. A Philosophical Moment	19
5. Defining Psyche, Soul, Mind, and Spirit	25
6. Self	31
7. A Brief History of Individuation	38
8. Two Ways of Individuating	44
Part II INDIVIDUATION IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY	49
9. The Opus: Finding the Spirit in Matter	51
10. Inner and Outer	60
11. Two Halves of Life	62
12. Sexual Identity	69
13. Relationship to the Collective	75
14. World Cultures	80
15. Individuation: Heroic and Mercurial	89
16. Elitism and Exceptions	97
17. Beyond the Depressive Position	103
18. Transcendent Traditions: A New Myth	110
19. Transcendent Traditions: Jung and Buddhism	116
20. Other Transcendent Traditions	121
21. A Question of Endpoints	125
Part III LAGNIAPPE	131
	ix

1. A Question of Principle	133
2. Avoiding Recipes, Accepting Responsibility	136
3. Reality of the Psyche	139
4. A Philosophical Moment	143
5. Defining Psyche, Soul, Mind, and Spirit	146
6. Self	148
7. A Brief History of Individuation	153
8. Two Ways of Individuating	156
9. The Opus: Finding the Spirit In Matter	159
10. Inner and Outer	164
11. Two Halves of Life	165
12. Sexual Identity	166
13. Relationship to the Collective	169
14. World Cultures	173
15. Individuation: Heroic and Mercurial	175
16. Elitism and Exceptions	179
17. Beyond the Depressive Position	181
18. Transcendent Traditions: A New Myth	186
19. Transcendent Traditions: Jung and Buddhism	188
20. Other Transcendent Traditions	189
21. A Question of Endpoints	195
BIBLIOGRAPHY	199
INDEX	209

Part 1

Introduction



A Question of Principle

I inquire, I do not assert; I do not here determine anything with final assurance; I conjecture, try, compare, attempt, ask...

(This comment by an alchemist, quoted by C.G. Jung in volume 16 of his *Collected Works*, captures the spirit of Jung's work and also of this project.)

Is there a principle of order operating throughout the universe, or are we all embedded in chaos? A pioneer in psychoanalysis, psychiatrist C.G. Jung, did not claim to have proof that there was such a principle, but he observed that, no matter what they believe, humans *behave* as if such a principle exists, and have done so throughout history and throughout all cultures.

Jung found that the *idea* of an ordering principle occurred in all cultures and that human behavior reflected an assumption of such a principle. He called that idea the "Self." He noted that as the body operates as a unit organizing a number of systems, so the psychic functions are organized by a unifying force. He proposed that our psychological life's work—becoming an integrated person, our "individuation"—is to learn how that principle of order manifests in us, to become more familiar with this Self that seems to influence our behavior. This principle or force has been known as the inner voice, a higher power, the dream-maker, the greater self, the mysterious "other" in our personality, the divine spark, the beloved, or destiny; but whatever it is called, many people recognize that something within them beyond their ordinary plans for themselves influences their lives.

Throughout this paper I will capitalize "Self" to distinguish it from the commonplace meaning of "self" that denotes a particular personality organization, as in "myself." "Self" with capital "S" is not an idea about something that is just personal. "Self" as Jung uses it has compli-

cated implications. We can think of it as the principle that gives organization and unity to our personality. But then, if we wonder, "Where does such a principle originate?" our perception widens. We can choose to believe it originates in human nature purely on a biological level, like a thermostat; or we can see it as implying a connection to some force beyond the human, a transpersonal random cosmic force; or we can imagine yet a connection to a superhuman intelligent source or divinity.

The Self, however we imagine it, might extend beyond a personal consciousness to include all of human consciousness and all that lies beyond us. But does Jung's "Self" make sense any longer? Not everyone is comfortable thinking in such grand terms as "universal principles." Self could be simply a chance consequence of evolution causing humans to create sensible stories that tie experiences together meaningfully, even though there is no reasonable order "out there." Rather than having a blueprint for our development as a person, the Self might merely keep adapting to whatever we choose to be at the moment.

A lot happened in the century after Jung made the idea of individuation his motif. Up and down, in and out, good and bad, male and female—designations like those would not stay in place, raising suspicions about an ordering principle. Sounds of the Big Bang were detected by scientists but denied by anti-scientists who question the reality of research. The moon was brought down to earth. We discovered how to make life in a lab and also how to wipe the world away utterly and in a flash. Kingdoms, forests, and languages were deconstructed. Cameras were swallowed, showing us enemies we hid inside ourselves. Brain scans revealed infants' intrauterine conversations with their mothers. Women wore their underwear on the outside, and men took off their armor and tucked it inside. Physicists trying to form consistent theories about the universe became more and more confused and entangled. The philosopher says we killed God, but the priest says he hears Something laughing. It is hard to tell our children what's what!

Jung thought that human nature was shaped by the Self acting within each personality and that our individuation occurred when we became conscious of cooperating with the Self. Being in touch with the Self would keep a person feeling whole, as opposed to feeling fragmented; it would be a source of stability as well as creative energy in the face of outer disorganization. My purpose here is to clarify the idea

of individuation; even if we have no background in psychology or philosophy, each of us can decide if it survives the chaos of contemporary thought. May the spirit of W.B. Yeats help us! The poet wrote:

Hands, do what you're bid:
Bring the balloon of the mind
That bellies and drags in the wind
Into its narrow shed.

So let us bring our balloon minds to the task, trying to tie to earth airy words and ideas.

Jung was deliberately vague in his description of the nature of the process so as to avoid too literal interpretations. He did not want to encourage "recipes" or oversimplified directions for what had to be a particularly unique process for each one of us.

In simplest form, individuation means choosing to be conscious, or mindful, and especially, it means becoming conscious of the person we are capable of being in our fullness, our strengths, and our limitations.

Is the concept of a process of individuation relevant in the 21st century? Some look into the chaos and say, "No, it is not; a principle of order seems to be missing from too many lives." Others say, "Yes, even in times of chaos, life continues to try to heal into harmony."

Probably as in all metaphysical questions, both are true: Life is—or has—meaning and meaninglessness. I cherish the anxious hope that meaning will preponderate and win the battle. (Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, p. 359.)

Perhaps after reading this you will be better able to decide that for yourself. If it is relevant, what is individuation now and what does the Self want for or from you?

Avoiding Recipes, Accepting Responsibility

In his autobiography, Jung describes his first reaction to reading alchemical texts: “Good Lord, what nonsense! This stuff is impossible to understand!” (Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, p. 204.)

I had a similar reaction to my first Jungian lecture, and I see in the way listeners’ eyes glaze over at some Jungian presentations that it’s not unusual to respond to Jungian thought this way in the beginning. A frequent criticism of Jung’s writing is that he delves into obscure stuff, such as alchemy, that is not current and practical. What’s important to keep in mind is that later Jung realized the alchemists were thinking in symbols and describing the individuation process as they imagined it; he saw the momentous value of what was being conveyed and found it exciting. As Jung stuck with studying alchemy, I stuck with studying Jung in spite of that first reaction. I hope you will stick with this too, as I will try to present the idea of individuation so as to minimize confusion.

It is crucial that we do not confuse *individuation* and *individualism*. The “know thyself” of Socrates does not translate to “It’s all about Me!” Individuation implies something other than maturation, good self-esteem, good adjustment, success, or fame. It involves restructuring the mind.

As individuals, these are times of mixed messages about what is of value, messages that come from such a variety of influences—from the markets of pop culture, health gurus, spiritual growth advisors, and religious institutions, even from the army: Be all that you can be! Every few months a new book catches hold of the public imagination, and millions of us throng to acquire it and the knowledge that will give us the “purposeful life,” the “secret” of life, the ten things that will make us make something of ourselves. How do we determine which paths to follow in becoming the person we are meant to be? Where should we put our energies and effort? Are there goals that will stand up to the vagaries of changing times and the aging process? Should we aim for

balance or passion, for stability or adaptability? Should I spend time and money analyzing myself or just take a pill and buy a new car?

There are similarities in many of these messages, and I will be trying to explain why I chose Jung's method to follow for myself. It is not the only way. Try to keep an open mind and remember that wise people have been thinking and speaking about these things forever. Of course, as my philosopher friend Bill Brenner says, "If your mind is too open, nothing can stay in it," so you are entitled to an opinion!

Step one: Become aware of the possibility of a relationship to the Self—as if the Self were an intelligible entity—and learn to speak with it. How? Theoretically the Self has access to our unconscious thoughts and feelings, while our egos know only our conscious thoughts and feelings. Through unexpected meetings with the unconscious processes, this unknown part of nature can be identified and engaged. This does not mean that we listen to some inner voice and obey anything it asks. I am speaking about having a conversation, even at times a debate with the Self.

There is a very practical reason for listening to our unconscious in the form of dreams and intuitions. As they connect us to unknown parts of ourselves, they can be life-savers. A friend dreamed that she was attacked in the chest with a foreign object. Since she was experiencing some mild changes in pulse rate, the dream spurred her on to have herself checked. Tests showed that she had a serious growth on her heart. Her condition was corrected by surgery, but, had it been ignored, probably would have killed her. Often a dream will warn you about a physical condition before your waking mind is aware of it.

Intuition sometimes warns us of dangers—dangerous decisions, people, and situations—that we would otherwise overlook. We can probably remember times when we had a warning feeling about someone who did prove to be untrustworthy or dangerous. We can't be sure of such intuitions—they can be wrong—but we should pay attention and check them out.

A patient was thrilled and yet uncomfortable (his intuition) about the pious woman he was in love with. She seemed to be in love with him too, so he couldn't understand why he was anxious. Then a dream supported his intuition: he dreamed that she was driving them recklessly. The car was heading for a cliff when he woke in a panic. Sobered from his state of infatuated elation, he began to ask more questions and

be more realistic about her values. He found that despite her reputation as a religious person, she was quite impulsive, had been dishonest about her accomplishments and, in fact, had a history of treating people destructively.

Besides dreams and intuitions, we become aware of the Self and the unconscious by paying attention to our strong passions and attractions, but also our uncomfortable feelings and reactions, like fear, jealousy, irritations, hatreds, envy, and physical symptoms—not just noticing them, but questioning their source. Why does this person's manner evoke a rage in me that has no reasonable explanation? What aspect of me does that person represent? Why do I always get a headache on Saturday morning? To seriously examine the question is to look at *why* we feel as we do, and not to automatically dismiss an experience as chance or say, "Because it's *true*." "Because he *is* annoying!" "It's a coincidence." "That's just the way I am."

Being in touch with the Self can affect your mental and physical health and can prevent your hiding from yourself and placing blame on others.

But beyond our own personal well-being, is the concept of individuation important for the human species? Jung feared that we as a human race were heading toward an impending catastrophe. He thought that by evolving psychologically we might be able to avoid and/or survive the threatening apocalypse, the collapse of civilized life. Jung is not alone in his concern about human survival. In an online essay about the development of intelligent life in the universe, the physicist Stephen Hawking said, "I shall take this to include the human race, even though much of its behaviour through out history has been pretty stupid, and not calculated to aid the survival of the species." (Hawking, "Life in the Universe," January, 2009.) Raising human consciousness is the key to making life on earth survivable, thought Jung.

The survival of the race as we know it is of questionable value. We are potentially capable of destroying our own planet and others. We are potentially capable of programming ourselves into cyborgs. Some consider the expanding human population to be a blight or virus on the earth, a failed experiment. Let us not debate this here, but assume that many of us wish that humans will survive, if not improve in our humanity.

Some argue that Jung is the most important psychologist of our century in that he pointed us to the *creative powers* that lie in the universal pool of knowledge in which we all participate. These creative powers are what we will either call on to rescue us from utter destruction of the race, or abandon along with humanity itself, or at least acknowledge as our companions in facing the unknown. Jung used the phrase “collective psyche.” It means essentially “the information present in the human race as a whole”—that information stored in our DNA, our memories, our brains, our cells, our instincts, and our common images and languages. “Collective unconscious,” “objective psyche,” and “collective psyche” are Jung’s terms that all mean the same thing, the sum total of the human race’s psychological experience.

The ability to learn from history is something we have often been too absorbed with ourselves to do. The connection with previous ages, with previous civilizations and empires, with our ancestors, with nature, and with future possibilities, all available to us in the collective psyche if we could only listen, would help our survival. This is a subject dear to many thoughtful scholars, a recent example being Jared Diamond. In his book, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, Diamond illustrates the effect of unconsciousness on the fate of many specific extinct civilizations. With attention to civilizations before us, we could be more enlightened about cultures and peoples of the world today, and about how our values interact.

More than that, Jung gave us a reason to believe that each of us is a participant in the cosmic creation responsible for adding to the consciousness of the universe. Perhaps each of us, by coming to know our own relationship to Self, contributes to the pool of consciousness in the universe. Each of us capable of understanding this has a responsibility for the evolution of mindfulness.

For example, when I think “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,” I think only about my personal pride. It is a leap of consciousness to realize that pure vengeance is a dead end. There were conditions when an attitude of dog-eat-dog, survival-at-any-cost, made sense. Information and resources were limited and strangers were a threat. But the world has shrunk and the human family is closely contained and connected; a different attitude is called for. Refusal to take revenge means thinking beyond mere pride in physical survival and seeing a larger picture that includes respecting the rights of others. If I take that leap, I begin to see

something more useful in negotiating than in destroying my enemy. It is possible that that bit of increased consciousness contributes to the consciousness of the whole, as each drop of water contributes to the sea.

Being curious—about your neighbor's welfare, your nation's policies toward the rest of the world, the welfare of other animal species and ecological systems, the condition of the planet—raises the level of consciousness of the whole by a little bit. This theme is explored in many art forms; see for example, the recent movies "Freedom Writers" and "Crash." In both movies the subjects of the stories were provoked to see beyond their personal needs into a larger worldview and an expansion of their capacity for compassion.

Early Greece produced plays that reflected such growth in awareness. Dionysus, the god of the renewal, symbolized by the grapevine, presided over many aspects of nature, including intoxication and madness. In early times he was celebrated with wild, drunken orgies, but as Greek civilization advanced and turned violence into art, the celebrations of Dionysus evolved into festivals of theatre. In their dramas the playwrights showed how generations of one family could be dominated by envy, vengeance, and murder, until an evolution of consciousness resulted in a system of justice. The patricides, fratricides, sacrificing of children, and slaying of enemies was replaced by a sense of restraint that allowed cooler heads to judge what was deemed fair. The Greeks gave credit to the gods for teaching them the advanced attitudes. Now we would say humans advance in consciousness through the awareness of potential benefits to all, through being Self-centric instead of egocentric.

These concerns, these everyday problems that we might bring to therapy, or the larger issues of the welfare of our species, are understandable. But what of timeless, transpersonal goals, the ultimate purposes of existence? Some psychologists feel this is a valid subject of psychology. Others do not. They criticize Jung for discussing psychology in relation to anthropology, religion, physics, astrology, sociology, literature, and so on. Most psychologists and therapists accept the physical and psychological dimensions of his ideas, but many do not accept the transcendent dimension, or at least do not think it a proper subject for psychology.

When we consider a transcendent dimension, we enlarge the psychological to include a sacred dimension. Some believe that Jung showed us that the ultimate goal of human psychological development is to find our place within a cosmic unity. He thought the physical and psychological, matter and mind, humans and nature, make up one, holistic reality. Within that cosmic unity is our image of a god. Perhaps God is not dead, but our image of God is changing. In that case, instead of blindly accepting an image of the divine from outside sources, such as a religious dogma, we would be actually responsible for changing our image of God by meeting and having dialogue with the Self.

For Jung, by becoming aware of a relationship with the Self, each individual is not abandoned to suffer the existential emptiness of individualism, but ultimately finds in his individual soul the presence of a whole universe and a relationship to its timelessness. We could come to discover and transform aspects of a spiritual presence in us through our own efforts to communicate with the Self. Some psychologists believe that the transcendent dimension could help us survive by creating a more tolerant and less selfish society. We could step outside of our personal values and see into the holiness of all of creation. We could feel connected to and responsible for all of creation.

But positing a transcendent dimension raises another issue. A conscious, unified universe can result from an intelligence that resides in man alone, or it can be the result of an intelligence that comes from a source beyond human consciousness. Analytical Psychology, as Jung's model of psychology is called, allows both a secular and a sacred character. Both presuppose a dimension of reality that is conscious, but one presumes that that consciousness is purposeful and intelligent.

The feeling that the Self is "other" opens the possibility that the "other" is a product of human consciousness alone, a secular theory; or the "other" may be a consciousness beyond the human, a divine intelligence, a spiritual theory. Secular and spiritual theories are more than just names. They result in different human behavior. A secular society seeks information and understanding and reduces anxiety through knowing. A spiritual society seeks mystery and reduces anxiety by not needing to know.

Secular humanism values human life and dignity and finds in those values enough reason to live a decent and even altruistic life without calling on the idea of divinity to support it. It does not require a rela-

tionship with the spiritual dimension to justify its values and does not support religious expressions of spirituality.

One of the assets of Jung's theory is that no one is obliged to accept the transcendent or spiritual dimension, but neither are we prohibited from including it as some ideologies would demand. For example, Freud considered the need for a spiritual life a weakness, wishful thinking, a defense against anxiety. Marxism denigrates religion, "the opiate of the masses," believing that it weakens rather than strengthens the validity of the community. According to Marx, religions reflect an unhealthy superstition which undermines pragmatic social action. In contrast to these theories, Jung believed that any psychological experience was worth studying seriously. He posited a religious instinct as part of the natural psyche and believed that many of the ills of today were the result of our having lost touch with our deep spiritual resources. We don't know if Jung believed that the Self extends beyond the human dimension. He may have been agnostic, or an atheist. What he believed is not relevant; he urged each of us to find our inner truth. In Analytical Psychology we are invited to explore the spiritual dimension.

In the secular understanding, the Self is a hypothetical construct, a working concept that can be explained on a biological level. It can be seen simply as a description of the way the human mind works without implying anything about the existence of things spiritual. There is much to be learned from Jung on a level of psychological theory, so that if you are a humanist or atheist you can find meaning there. The universe may be a vast being, evolving without a plan but steered by human intelligence.

The Self can also imply the existence of a dimension of reality that is intelligent and purposeful and that is not produced by human physical and cultural movements—in fact, is independent of human nature and, therefore, sacred. Those who imagine the Self this way experience it as divine and might give it images and names of gods, goddesses, or other divine figures. They can picture themselves in constant intimate union with this divinity or separate, emotionally detached, and respectful of it.

In either case, there is no point outside of the psyche from which to view the psyche, so there is no scientific answer to the question of whether a transcendent dimension exists. Even if we imagine a divine being responsible for the universe, humanists would point out that that

does not provide any answers as to the origin of the divine. Either approach ends in mystery. Jung imagined that there could be some way of answering the question at some distant time in our evolution and that physics might advance to find such an answer.

This discussion of Jung's contribution to the survival of the species is not meant to imply that Jung's is the only message that can support our survival or that he alone is a messiah of psychological awareness. We will consider how his way of describing development is consistent with some other paths to fulfillment, and how it differs from some as well.



The life of Buddha is an example of individuation. He was privileged and enjoyed every possible means of comfort and pleasure, sheltered from want. What moved him to want to experience the world beyond his palace? He went into the world of ordinary people and found sickness, poverty, and suffering. It seemed he felt his life was not complete until he had experienced the dark and sordid side of life. Only then could he fulfill his destiny as a spiritual sage. His life illustrates the idea that we are not completed by being good or by having what seems like perfection. Individuation as completion means filling out all of our possible conscious experiences and being aware of our potential, the pleasant and unpleasant, good and bad.

Reality of the Psyche

In 1965, Jolande Jacobi, Jung's colleague, wrote *The Way of Individuation*, now a classic. We can use it as a source for delving into questions that speak to us a half-century later. During that half-century the blooming of modernism, post-modernism, and post-post-modern thought raised questions and nuances that color and complicate our images of individuation as presented by Jacobi.

Jung saw himself as a scientific observer of human behavior, not a philosopher who speculated about truth. Still, he was influenced by his own philosophical orientation, as we all are whether we know it or not. We are products of the dominant philosophies of our century, our society, our family, our education. Before adopting anyone's opinions as our own, we should consider what influenced them. Jung wrote:

Although I owe not a little to philosophy, and have benefited by the rigorous discipline of its methods of thought, I nevertheless feel in its presence that holy dread which is inborn in every observer of facts. ("Foreword to Mehlich, 'Fichte's Psychology and Its Relation to the Present,'" CW 18, par. 1730.)

Many of us approach philosophy with holy dread. Its depth threatens to drown us in a confusion of ideas. Jung tried to limit himself to observable facts rather than philosophical speculations. He discussed the concept of individuation in many places throughout his writings, but always guarded against being specific about a process that was meant to serve the particular truth of each individual. So his descriptions of the Self as both the initiator of growth and the endpoint, or we can say, the motivator as well as the goal of individuation, also were vague enough to leave much to speculation.

In order to grasp Jung's intentions, we have to accept his image of himself as an empiricist—one who deals with observable facts, rather than a metaphysician—one who deals with unseen, non-physical sub-

jects. He insisted that he was not talking about supernatural phenomena, the nature of God, or religion. Nor did he claim to be a theologian. If he spoke of God, it was the image of God found in the minds of his subjects of observation. He spoke of the "reality of the psyche." What does that mean?

From the beginning of time humans have described their images of the literal or observable world and also of imaginal or spiritual worlds. Though a spiritual world can never be proven by reason, the human psyche persists in imaging and conceiving of a world beyond its concrete experience. Many think of that world as infinite, despite the fact that we have no way of conceiving of infinity through experience. We can only understand infinity by its absence from our experience, through our imagination. This consistent experience of trusting something beyond the senses, of transcending mere physical experience in our imagination, despite the absence of "actual" confirmation, is what Jung called the "reality of the psyche."

If you have a "mathematical mind," you are attracted to certain abstract notions, like the notion of infinity, or principles of ordering of numbers by formula. Mathematics is founded on a belief in the regularity of truth. As mathematics becomes advanced, it works in a world of symbols whose meanings are obscure to non-mathematicians, but are real enough to be discovered, repeated, and related in some deep way to the working of the material world. This is the "reality of numbers."

For a physicist, reality is more than meets the senses. We live in a world of such complexity, only available to us through the imagination. The typical illustration of this complexity of ordinary objects from the standpoint of subatomic particles in constant motion is often presented as considering a physical object as resembling "a bowl of jello." (Bartusiak, *Einstein's Unfinished Symphony*, p. 146.)

Similarly, if you have a "psychological mind," you are attracted to abstract notions of the landscape of the psyche/soul. "Psychology" from the Greek, means "the study of soul." Yet these days, some scientists may not tolerate the use of the word "soul" as the subject of psychology, and the more acceptable word is "mind." But we cannot refer to "mind" in the same way psychologists did years ago when the "mind" was considered fairly well differentiated from the body. Neither can we limit "mind" to brain substance. Now we think of "mind" as a complex function that includes networks of information from inside

(nerve messages, chemicals carried in the bloodstream, et cetera) and outside of the body (visual and auditory sources of information, stimuli, conditioning, et cetera).

To further complicate the study of mind, the subject, the mind, is also the student! This creates weird loops, paradoxes, and resonances within the being of the psychologist that can be dizzying! Looking at ourselves, we look into a hall of mirrors.

We are tantalized by trying to find the “I” that does the looking. We call that “I” the ego, but we come to see that the ego is not the only “eye” in the psyche. Depth psychology sees that the ego revolves around a point that is both in it and around it. The ego revolves around the Self as the earth revolves around the sun. How can that be understood?

We can observe ourselves and our mirror-minds and souls through many lenses. From the lens of particle physics we explore the elements of consciousness at the microscopic level, dissecting and stimulating the brain. This is a valuable and necessary investigation in understanding our world, but it has no practical application for a parent, a baseball player, or a therapist at this stage of knowledge. There is no way we can apply what we learn about brain cells from the microscope, no matter how interesting, to living life in the moment.

We can explore consciousness through a larger lens which studies how the brain and bodily systems produce our abstract concepts, such as a consistent sense of self. This research we can apply on an individual basis to help us understand our behavior, but it is generally out of our hands as far as helping us make decisions or accepting responsibility. For example, we may see how the brain’s amygdala communicates with its prefrontal cortex, and how that affects our decision-making processes. That may be helpful in understanding the effect of a brain injury or drug incident, but that is not especially useful in an urgent instant of decision making.

A wider lens looks at the interactions of that self with society and its place in the human system. Here we begin to assert an aspect of freedom of choice. As creatures that have an impact on other creatures, we make decisions that can be examined and judged. We may have limited choices of behavior—not total free will, but we have some choice.

An even wider lens, the lens of depth psychology, attempts to abstract farther into human consciousness as it affects and is affected by

movement in the universe that reaches beyond our present day human society, into history, culture, and religion.

In the words of Jung:

All our knowledge consists of stuff of the psyche—which, because it alone is immediate, is superlatively real. Here, then, is a reality to which the psychologist can appeal—namely psychic reality...Psychic contents are derived from the “material” environment; as when I picture the car I want to buy. Others, no less real, seem to come from a “spiritual” source which appears to be very different from the physical environment, such as wondering about the state of the soul of my dead father. My fear of a ghost is a psychic image just as real to me as my fear of fire. We don’t try to account for our fear of either one by physical arguments, but we experience each of them as real... Unless we accept the reality of the psyche we try to explain our experiences in a way that does violence to many of them—those (experiences) expressed through superstition, religion, and philosophy. Truth that appeals to the testimony of the senses may satisfy reason, but it offers nothing that stirs our feelings and expresses them by giving a meaning to human life. (“Basic Postulates of Analytical Psychology,” CW 8, par. 680-686.)

We human beings have been portraying ourselves repeatedly in literature and myth as part animal, part angel; or as occupying the space between heaven and earth. From ancient to contemporary times, human thought has gravitated between what appears to be a duality: physical reality (phenomena, representations, matter) and an otherworldly reality of “forms” (noumena, ideals, essences, universals). The earliest philosophers, like Plato, could speak authoritatively of the soul, of immortality, infinity, of a world of “forms” or ideals. From them we learned to speak about “eternal truths”—the value of honesty, loyalty, bravery, justice—that they are in the mind; they cannot be demonstrated to result from logical facts. They are abstractions, but they are real values.

A famous lesson in the abstract value of honesty is Plato’s story of the Ring of Gyges, a ring that renders one invisible and leads its owner to utter selfishness. Gyges, a poor shepherd, unexpectedly comes upon the ring on a corpse and steals it. Realizing that it makes him invisible, he uses its power to take whatever he wants. He steals the king’s gold

and even his wife, and becomes king. Plato uses this to illustrate “egoism,” a form of moral skepticism. Yet we recognize that another attitude is possible, an attitude that considers that Gyges could have chosen not to use his powers dishonestly. Perhaps he would not have achieved much, but he might have chosen to be honest. The story prompts us to reflect on the human tendency to pursue selfish goals rather than look at a more abstract value. An extreme of skepticism would be to say dismissively, “Honesty is just an abstract concept in the mind. It does not otherwise exist.”

If no one could see you, would you do good? Why, or why not?

Immanuel Kant concluded his *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) with these memorable words: “Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the more often and steadily we reflect upon them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.”

In the next chapter we will do a whirlwind tour, skimming through centuries of the history of philosophy as it broadly relates to psychology. Fasten your seatbelts if you choose to look into this historical context of Analytical Psychology.

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INDEX

A

- "A Beautiful Mind" (the movie) 107
Active Imagination 121, 129, 161
Adams, Michael Vannoy 92, 149, 164
addiction 52-53, 62, 76, 171
Aida (opera) 106
Alcoholics Anonymous 52
"Big Book" 52
Als, Hilton
"Intruder in the Wings" 62
Alschuler, Lawrence 57, 86, 87
"Jung and Politics" (lecture) 86, 169
Ammann, Peter 85
Angelou, Maya 124
Anima 25, 27, 67, 146, 167-168
Anima/Animus 146, 167
Anima Mundi 25, 27
Animus 67, 146, 167-168
Anna Karenina (novel) 106
"an observing ego" 46
Anthroposophy 121, 191
apartheid 80
Apollonian 144
Aquarius, age of 171-172
Archetypal Psychologies 91, 118, 149, 175-176
Aristotle 32, 62
arrogance 46, 77, 94
Ashton, Paul
"Evocations of Absence" 162
Auden, W. H.
"As I Walked Out One Evening" 120

B

- Bartusiak, Marcia 15, 42
Einstein's Unfinished Symphony 15
Beckett, Samuel 185
Beebe, John 145, 178
The Psychology of Mature Spirituality 178
Bernadette of Lourdes 110
Bernstein, Jerome 82
Living in the Borderland 82
Power and Politics 169
Bernstein, Leonard 19
Bhakti yogis 124
Big Bang 4
"Billy Elliott" (the movie) 61
Bion, Wilfred 126
Bloom, Paul
"Is God an Accident?" 133, 187
Bly, Robert
The Kabir Book 59
Bolen, Jean Shinoda 164
Goddesses in Every Woman 168
Gods in Every Man 168
Brenner, Bill 7
Brooke, Roger 84, 156
Pathways to Integrity 85, 145
Buber, Martin 151-152, 187
Buddha, the 13, 61, 112, 116, 148
Buddhism 34, 78, 111-112, 116-121, 188-189, 191, 194
Buddhists 40, 92, 118-119

C

- Cambray, Joseph 186, 189
"Synchronicity and emergence,"
American Imago 186

Caplan, Eric
Mind Games: American Culture and the Birth of Psychotherapy 189

Carus, Carl Gustav 33, 139

Casement, Ann
The Idea of the Numinous 141-142, 167, 174, 185

chaos 3, 5, 91, 99, 107, 175, 182

child pornography 73

clitorisectomies 74

Cobain, Kurt 52

Copernicus, Nicolaus 20

Corbett, Lionel 145, 160
Psyche and the Sacred 145-146, 160, 165, 180

cosmetic surgery 65

"Crash" (the movie) 10

creative powers 9

creative process 26, 63, 76

cyborgs 8, 26, 170

D

Dallett, Janet 87, 122, 128, 152
Peace is Every Step 88
Saturday's Child: Encounters with the Dark Gods 122
The Not-yet Transformed God 152
When the Spirits Come Back 128

Damasio, Antonio 39, 150, 154, 175
Descartes' Error 39, 155, 166, 176

"Darjeeling Limited" (the movie) 61

de Chardin, Teilhard 111

deconstruction 21-22, 141

Descartes, René 39, 81, 155, 166, 176

Diamond, Jared 9
Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed 9

Dionysian 70, 124, 144, 196

Dionysus 10, 21, 144, 167

Dorn, Gerhard 159
Theatricum Chemicum 159

Doubly Special Relativity (theory of) 26

Dourley, John 114, 134, 149, 162
A Strategy for a Loss of Faith 114, 117
 "Jung, Some Mystics, and the Void" 162
 Response to Barbara Stephens 134, 187

Drob, Sanford 134, 175, 189
 "Jung's Kabbalistic Visions" 134, 189

Duncan, Joseph 38

Dylan, Bob 68

dysfunctional family system 54

E

Eckhart, Meister 116, 184, 187

Edelman, Gerald
A Universe of Consciousness 153

Edinger, Edward F. 42, 111-112, 114, 136-137, 148, 152, 159-161, 179
Science of the Soul 114, 136, 160, 179
The Creation of Consciousness 111, 148
The Mysterium Lectures 42, 159

Einstein, Albert 15, 58, 91

electromagnetic energy 27

Eliade, Mircea 193
Shamanism 193

Ellenberger, Henri
The Discovery of the Unconscious 33, 43, 143, 148

emotional brain 73, 90

enantiodromia 32

Epictetus (Stoic) 19

Epicureans 19

epistemology 33, 133

Epstein, Mark
Thoughts Without a Thinker 118-119
 Estés, Clarissa Pinkola 164
Everyman (the play) 20
 "Eye of God" 137

F

Feynman, Richard 130, 133
 "Forced Marriage Act" 80
 Fordham, Michael 104, 157
Children as Individuals 158
 "Freedom Writers" (the movie) 10
 Freud, Sigmund
The Future of an Illusion 91, 183

G

Gad, Irene
Tarot and Individuation 189
 Galilei, Galileo 20
 gamma rays 27
 Garland, Judy 52
 genital mutilation 74
 Gilligan, Carole 175
In a Different Voice 175
 Gnostic(s) 34, 134-135, 148, 184, 187
 Godard, Jean-Luc 62
 God-image 35, 65, 66, 112, 152
 Great Spirit 124
 Grinnell, Robert 93, 143, 150
Alchemy in a Modern Woman 40, 85, 93, 143, 150
 Grotstein, James S.
Who is the Dreamer Who Dreams the Dream? 185, 198
 "Bion's 'Transformation in O'" 182, 184-185

Gundry, Mark
Beyond Psyche: Symbol and Transcendence in C.G. Jung 133-134, 186
 Gurdjieff, George 121, 136

H

Hafiz 124
 Hamlet 106
 Hannah, Barbara 161
Active Imagination 161
 "Harry Potter" 22
 Hart, David
The Classical Jungian School 97, 165
 Hartmann, Eduard von 33, 139
 Hawking, Stephen 8
Life in the Universe 8
 Hegarty, Antony 72
 Hegel, Georg 24, 34, 148, 177
 "Absolute" 34
 Henderson, Joseph 189
 Heraclitus 31, 32
 Hermes 36, 93, 95
 hierarchy of needs 90
 Higuchi, Kazuhiko 118
 Hill, Bernice 76
Money and the Spiritual Warrior 76
 Hillman, James 78, 91, 146, 149-150, 153, 164, 167, 170, 176-177, 196
Kinds of Power 78, 170
Puer Papers 146
The Myth of Analysis 153, 167, 196
 Hoeller, Stephan A.
The Gnostic Jung and the Seven Sermons to the Dead 135, 148
 Hofstadter, Douglas R.
I Am a Strange Loop 39, 153

Hollis, James 164
 Holy Grail 125
 Holy Spirit 27
 Hopkins, Gerard Manley 25
 Horgan, John
 "Why Freud Isn't Dead" 106,
 156-157
 Hume, David 148
 humility 35-36, 46, 55, 77, 85,
 113-114, 180
 Huskinson, Lucy 101, 144, 148,
 149
 Dreaming the Myth Onwards 144
 The Self as Violent Other 149,
 196

I

Ignatius 121, 191
 image of God 11, 15, 34, 193

J

Jackson, Michael 52
 Jacobi, Jolande 14, 44, 65, 98-99,
 126, 165
 The Way of Individuation 14, 99,
 126, 165
 Jacoby, Mario 197
 Individuation and Narcissism 197
 James, William 20, 22, 104, 108
 Varieties of Religious Experience
 104
 Johnson, Robert 161
 Inner Work 149, 161
 Joyce, James 37, 93, 99, 148
 Ulysses 37
 Jung, C.G.
 Answer to Job 151, 193
 "Commentary on *The Secret of*
 the Golden Flower" 29

Memories, Dreams, Reflections 5,
 6, 99, 134-135, 176, 193,
 194
 "Mysterium Coniunctionis" 57,
 114
 "On Synchronicity" 186
 "On the Nature of the Psyche"
 28
 "On the Psychology of the Un-
 conscious" 97, 179
 "Psychological Types" 145, 148
 "Religious Ideas in Alchemy" 39
 "Seven Sermons to the Dead"
 135, 193
 "Synchronicity: An Acausal Con-
 necting Principle" 186
 "The Aims of Psychotherapy"
 126
 "The Archetypes and the Collec-
 tive Unconscious" 115
 "The Conjunction" 56, 160-161
 "The Psychology of the Child
 Archetype" 192
The Red Book 161, 163, 193
 "The Relations Between the Ego
 and the Unconscious" 57,
 97, 136, 195
 "The Self" 148

K

Kabbalah 34, 134, 187, 189-190
 Kabbalists 121, 190-191
 Kabir 59, 163
 Kalsched, Donald 177
 The Inner World of Trauma 177
 Kant, Immanuel 18, 24, 33, 148,
 175
 a priori categories 33
 Critique of Practical Reason 18
 Kazantzakis, Nikos
 The Saviors of God 152
 Kelly, Tom 76

- Kerényi, Karl 144
Dionysos: Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life 144
- Kinder, George 77
- Klein, Melanie 103, 181
- Kohut, Heinz 183
- Kushner, Harold S.
When Bad Things Happen to Good People 152
- L**
- Lammer, Ann
In God's Shadow: The Collaboration of Victor White and C.G. Jung 152
- Larkin, Philip 69
 "Annus Mirabilis" in *Collected Poems* 69
- Lennon, John 102, 124
- Levertov, Denise 163
- Levinas, Emmanuel 149, 175
- Lewis, Amini, and Lannon
A General Theory of Love 147
- Lincoln, Abraham 61
- Linehan, Marsha
Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment of Borderline Personality Disorder 169-170
- Lord of the Rings 22
- M**
- Magid, Barry 98, 188
Ending the Pursuit of Happiness 98, 188
Ordinary Mind: Exploring the Common Ground of Zen and Psychoanalysis 188
- Magna Carta 42
- Main, Roderick 174
 "Numinosity and Terror" 174
- Mallon, Ted
Journey Toward Masterful Philanthropy 77
- Mandela, Nelson 80-81
- Marlan, Stanton 189
Archetypal Psychologies 91, 118, 175, 189
The Black Sun 162
- Marxism 12
- Maslow, Abraham 90
- McCartney, Paul 102
- McNeely, Deldon Anne
Animus Aeternus 168
Walking the Crooked Mile 108
- Meier, C.A.
Atom and Archetype 144
- Meissner, W.W.
On Putting a Cloud in a Bottle 183, 184
- mercurial 36, 89-90, 94, 149, 175
- mercurial individuation 36, 90
- Mercurius 93-95
- mesmerism 121
- midlife crisis 63
- Miller, David 108, 161, 164
 "Nothing Almost Sees Miracles!"
Self and No-Self in Psychology and Religion 108
- Mithra 52
- Miyuki, Mokusen 118
Buddhism and Jungian Psychology 112, 117-118
- Morgan, Vance
Weaving the World: Simone Weil on Science, Mathematics, and Love 114
- Muramoto, Shoji
Awakening and Insight: Zen Buddhism and Psychotherapy 78, 120

N

- Nagy, Marilyn 139
Philosophical Issues in the Psychology of C.G. Jung 136
- Nash, John 107
- Native-American 81-83
- Navajo 82, 192
- Neo-Platonists 32
- Neumann, Erich 152, 189
- New Age movement 121, 122, 123, 161

- Nietzsche, Friedrich 34, 101, 144, 148, 177, 195
 "Übermensch" 34, 101
- Nhat Hanh, Thich 88
- nihilism 21-22, 133, 141
- numinous 36, 134, 137, 161-162, 185

O

- Odajnyk, Walter
Jung and Politics: The Political and Social Ideas of C.G. Jung 169
- Odysseus 36, 93
- Oedipus 106
- O'Keefe, Georgia 61
opus contra naturam 45, 51
- Osiris 192
- Otto, Rudolf
The Idea of the Holy 193

P

- Pantheists 40
- Parker, Charlie 52
- Parsons, Michael
Mankind's Attempt to Understand Itself 183
- Pauli, Wolfgang 139, 144, 186

- Peale, Norman Vincent 121-123
The Power of Positive Thinking 121
- Pearce, Joseph Chilton 168
The Biology of Transcendence 168, 171
- Penelope 36
- Penrose, Roger
The Large, the Small, the Human Mind 154
- persona (social mask) 51, 62, 101, 157, 173
- Pfister, Oskar
The Illusion of a Future 183
- Piercy, Marge
 "The Moon is Always Female" 74
- Pisces, age of 171
- Plato 17-19, 24, 31-32, 52, 81, 95, 168
Ring of Gyges 17
- Plotinus 32-33
- Pollock, Jackson 52
- Polygamy 72
- post-traumatic stress disorder 106
- "Power of Positive Thinking" 123
- Presley, Elvis 52
- Progoff, Ira
Depth Psychology and Modern Man 185
- Psyche and Eros (the myth), 30
- psychosis 44-45, 128-129
- Pythagoras 41-42, 172
- Pythagorean 32, 41-42

Q

- Quimby, Phineas 121

R

- radio waves 27

- Raff, Jeffrey 126, 151
Jung and the Alchemical Imagination 58, 126, 129, 151, 197, 198
- Reagan, Michael
The Hand of God 110, 130
- reflective individuation process
 44, 72
- reptilian brain 73
- Rieff, Philip 133
- Rilke, Rainer Maria
Selected Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke 47
- Roman society 19
- Romanticism 20, 33, 90, 139, 143
- Romanticists 42, 90
- Roosevelt, Eleanor 61
- Rosen, David 164
- Rothko, Theodore 52
- Rowland, Susan
Jung as a Writer 144, 167, 176, 197
- Rumi 124
- S**
- Sacred Heart 124
- Sacred Marriage 124
- sacrifice of ego 66
- sadomasochistic 73
- sadomasochistic games 73
- Samuels, Andrew 97, 125, 148, 164, 169
A Critical Dictionary of Jungian Analysis 98, 146, 180
Jung and the Post-Jungians 148-149, 180
- scapegoat 54
- Schelling, Friedrich von 24, 33
- schizophrenia 107, 157
- Scholem, Gershom 189
Alchemy and Kabbalah 187
- Schopenhauer, Arthur 33, 116
- Schore, Allan
 "The Effect of Early Relational Trauma on Right Brain Development" 106, 154
- Schucman, Helen
A Course in Miracles 121
- Scientology 123
- Self symbols 35
- Seligman, Martin 122, 157
- sexual trafficking 74-75
- Sharp, Daryl 164
Jung Lexicon: A Primer of Terms and Concepts 146
- Shintoism 116
- Skeptics 19
- Slater, Glen
 "Cyborgian Drift: Resistance is not Futile" 170-171
- Smith, C. Michael 83, 137
Jung and Shamanism in Dialogue 84, 137
- Smith, Curtis D. 140
Jung's Quest for Wholeness: A Religious and Historical Perspective 140
- Smolin, Lee 26, 41, 142
The Trouble with Physics 27, 42, 142, 169
- social mask (persona) 62
- Socrates 6, 24, 75, 188
- Sophia-Wisdom 124
- Spiegelman, Marvin 111, 190
The Unhealed Healer 190
Buddhism and Jungian Psychology 112, 117-118
- Steiner, Rudolf 148, 191
The Course of My Life 191
- Stein, Murray 87, 149, 157, 177, 193
Divinity expresses the Self 149, 187
Journal of Jungian Theory and Practice 87, 195

The Principle of Individuation

157, 173, 193

Stoics 19

substance abuse 44-45 (also see
addiction)

Sufi dancers 124

Sufism 121

synchronicity 121, 144, 186

syzygy 70, 167

T

Tacey, David 141, 149, 161, 164

The Idea of the Numinous 141-
142, 167, 174, 185*Tales of Narnia* 22

Tangoers 124

Taoism 33

Taylor, Jill 89

My Stroke of Insight 89*The Cambridge Companion to Jung*
57, 87, 92, 97, 119, 139,
143, 149, 165, 167, 169,
173, 181-182, 196*The Da Vinci Code* 22

"The Matrix" (the movie) 22

Theosophy 121

"The Waitress" (the movie) 61

Thomas, Dylan 36, 52

"Ears in the Turret Hear" 36

Tononi, Giulio

A Universe of Consciousness 153*Tosca* (opera) 106

Transcendentalism 121

Transcendentalist movement 90

Transcendentalists 42

Tristan and Isolde (opera) 106**U***unio mentalis* 52

Universal Soul 25

unus mundus 57, 186**V**von Franz, Marie-Louise 130,
189, 197*Interpretation of Fairy Tales* 130**W**

Waide, John

"The Making of Self and World
in Advertising" 76

Watkins, Mary 149, 177

Invisible Guests 177

Watts, Alan 164

Psychotherapy East and West 164*The Way of Zen* 109

Weil, Simone 113, 114, 121

Gravity and Grace 121

Wenders, Wim 29

"Wings of Desire" (the movie)
29

Wheelwright, Jane 167

For Women Growing Older 168

White, Victor 149, 151-152

Whitman, Walt 24, 30-31, 79,
124*The Base of All Metaphysics* 24

Wilbur, Ken 144

Quantum Questions 115, 144

Wilde, Oscar 125

"De Profundis" 125

Wilhelm, Richard 193

The Secret of the Golden Flower
29, 193

Williams, Don 121, 189

Wilmer, Harry 164

"Wings of Desire" (the movie) 29

Wittgenstein, Ludwig 94, 183

Woodman, Marion 164

World Soul 33-34

Y

Yeats, W.B. 5

Young-Eisendrath, Polly 57, 77-
78, 87, 92, 119-120, 139,
143, 149, 165, 167, 169,
173, 177-178, 181-182, 196

*Awakening and Insight: Zen Bud-
dhism and Psychotherapy* 78,
120

Z

Zaretsky, Eli

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Cultural History of Psycho-
analysis* 189

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Deldon Anne McNeely received her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from Louisiana State University and is a member of the International Association for Analytical Psychology. A senior analyst of the Inter-Regional Society of Jungian Analysts, she is a training analyst for their New Orleans Jungian Seminar. Publications include *Touching: Body Therapy and Depth Psychology*; *Animus Aeternus: Exploring the Inner Masculine*; and *Mercury Rising: Women, Evil, and the Trickster Gods*.



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