

## Jung's metaphysics

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Despite it being the focal point of his theoretical system, I argue that Jung's notion of the archetypes is one of his least understood concepts because it was nebulous to Jung himself. Jung vacillated between viewing archetypes as analogous to primordial images and ideas inherited from our ancestral past, formal a priori categories of mind, cosmic projections, emotional and valuational agencies, and numinous mystical experience, but the question remains whether a 'suprapersonal' or 'transsubjective' psyche exists. In what follows, I will be pre-occupied with tracing the theoretical development of Jung's thesis on the collective unconscious, with a special emphasis on the archetypes, and hence pointing out the metaphysical implications of his thought. It is not possible to critique his entire body of work in the context of this abbreviated article; therefore, the reader should be aware that I am limiting myself to a narrow scope of interest in explicating and analyzing the philosophical viability of his major concepts. The greater question is whether the archetypes adequately answer to the question of origins, of an omnipresent and eternal dimension to the nature and structure of psychic reality.

**Keywords:** Jung; metaphysics; collective unconscious; archetypes; transcendence

C.G. Jung is one of the most controversial figures in the history of psychoanalysis. He was a brilliant scholar tenaciously engaged in the human sciences, comparative religion, philosophy, cultural anthropology, mythology, theosophy, and the mystical traditions of East and West. He was also purported to suffer from mental illness, engaged in sexual transgressions with patients, and lived an unorthodox lifestyle for his era. Despite having achieved notable world fame in his lifetime for his novel theories and clinical method, including receiving eight honorary doctorates, his most radical metaphysical theses on the nature of the transpersonal psyche still remain murky and unsystematized.

Throughout this essay, I attempt to clarify the main theoretical postulates that constitute Jung's metaphysics and address to what degree they are philosophically plausible. In so doing, I shall forgo the typical academic custom of reviewing all the secondary literature on the subject matter and instead remain focused on what Jung actually said in his primary texts. In this way, I will spare the reader the redundancy of offering a banal literature review and approach Jung's texts in a fresh manner unencumbered by the imposition of previous interpretations that may color my analysis of his thought.

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At the heart of his metaphysical system of inquiry lies the premise that all psychological processes are necessarily conditioned on innate universal structures of subjectivity that allow for human experience to transpire, and that these processes participate of a greater cosmic organizing principle that transcends all levels of particularity or individuality. This is not necessarily an illegitimate claim, for many philosophical schools have attempted to achieve coherence and explanatory breadth in forming a conceptual unity between religion, science, and cosmology. What makes Jung peculiar in the history of metaphysical thought is that he elevates this nexus or *coniunctio* to a psychological factor that conditions all metaphysical speculations on the nature of the universe. For Jung, the nature of reality is psychic process constituted as an impersonal animating force that is superimposed on human experience and transgenerationally transmitted throughout the ages. This is the doctrine of archetypes.

Implicit throughout Jung's theoretical corpus is the notion that there is another dimension to reality that structures and colors our internal experiences and perception of the world. There is something very appealing yet eerie to this view, at once accommodating but uncanny, sublime yet horrific. Perhaps this annulling duality signifies the dialectical tension of opposites Jung himself emphasizes in his quest for wholeness, a *mysterium tremendum* that becomes intuitively problematic when examined under the microscope of reason. But intuition is also recalcitrant to reason, hence revealing a deeply felt gnosis that resonates within the interiority of our being. Can we remain on a rational plane when discussing inner felt experience that speaks to us personally, and with bona fide self-certainty, while at the same time being neutered by the inhospitable hands of logos?

Jung champions a metaphysics of experience that is guided by an internalized yet originally inherited collective consciousness, which has been unconsciously transmuted and memorialized within spacetime, and laid down within the structural configurations of human imagination. The question becomes whether this imagination emanates from an equiprimordial wellspring that conditions the production of all contents of imagination, or whether images and psychic artefacts can be sufficiently explained without appealing to earlier archaic elements that predate the birth of the concretely existing human subject. In other words, do we need to appeal to an ancestral past in order to explain present experience? Do we currently occupy a spirit(ual) world emanating from a central ubiquitous Source that is responsible for the collective development of the human race? In order to broach these questions respectfully, we must understand what Jung meant by the collective unconscious.

### **The collective unconscious as a metaphysical category**

The collective unconscious is a term Jung uses almost interchangeably and synonymously with the archetypes and is in essence a spacing, container, or receptacle that symbolizes world human experience. Despite the fact that the collective unconscious may symbolize universal culture, namely, the anthropological images, practices, mores, edicts, and values that embody a particular society and its *mythos*, which become the structural invariants of subjectivity, it may be argued that Jung assigns a certain ontology to the collective unconscious, for anything that has being or presence is professed to exist. Whether or not the ontology of the collective unconscious is a hypostatization or anthropomorphism is another issue, one that will be explored later on. For the time being, however, Jung certainly did not mean to

imply that the collective unconscious was merely a metaphor, social construction, or linguistic signifier determined by grammatical relativism. On the contrary, he wanted to delineate its presence as real and elevate it to the proper stature of a metaphysical category that was operative within all human beings regardless of history, gender, race, geography, or time. In this sense, Jung was first and foremost an ontologist interested in defending a universal theory of mind.<sup>1</sup>

The collective unconscious, what Jung also refers to as the ‘*transpersonal unconscious*’ or ‘objective psyche’ (Jung, 1917, p. 66, fn.4), lies ‘beyond everyday reality,’ yet we are simultaneously ‘in touch with that other reality’ at all times (Kirsh, 2000, p. 256). Joseph Henderson (1964), one of Jung’s early ‘patrons’ of the C.G. Jung Institute in Zurich, describes the collective unconscious as ‘the part of the psyche that retains and transmits the common psychological inheritance of mankind’ (p. 107). In his translation of Jung’s ‘Psychological Commentary’ on the *Bardo Thödol*, or *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (1957), R.F.C. Hull characterizes the collective unconscious as ‘the matrix of everything’ (p. xxxvi), hence lending a cosmic animating principle to the collective psyche, what we may even compare to Plato’s *chora*, the womb of all becoming. For Jung, the collective unconscious is the Encompassing, the condition and ground of existence, the World Soul (*anima mundi*).<sup>2</sup>

Jung’s philosophy of the collective unconscious presupposes a psychologism at the heart of all metaphysical processes, for, in his words, ‘metaphysical assertions ... are statements of the psyche’ (1957, p. xxxvii) ultimately rooted in the soul’s (*Seele*) projections. For Jung, psychic reality and metaphysical reality are identical:

It is the soul which, by the divine creative power inherent in it, makes the metaphysical assertion; it posits the distinctions between metaphysical entities. Not only is it the condition of all metaphysical reality, it *is* that reality. (ibid., p. xxxviii)

Here Jung joins the ranks of the great German Idealists who view reality as the product of mind. But he could also be accused of espousing a crass idealism, where the psyche is believed to think the world into existence. I do not believe Jung makes this explicit statement anywhere in his *Collected Works*; however, he does not want to bifurcate nature from psyche, namely, that which is given, thrown, or predetermined, and hence psyche and reality are ontologically conjoined.

Throughout his body of writings, Jung refers to the collective unconscious as comprising both the drives or instincts (*Triebe*) and the archetypes or primordial images (1919, pp. 133–134, 138), which he equates with a ‘supra-individual psychic activity’ (1927, p. 148) conditioned by our ancestral heritage and belonging to ‘a timeless and universal psyche’ (ibid., p. 152). Jung goes so far to say that ‘the whole of mythology could be taken as a sort of projection of the collective unconscious’ (ibid., p. 152), raising the question and problematic of whether it is an agency in its own right, what the editors of his *Collected Works* attribute to an ‘unconscious entity’ (1919, p. 133, fn.7). This conclusion imports many philosophical conundrums including: how could separate agencies interact; how could different psychic organizations and productions participate of one another when by definition they would have incompatible essences; and what or who is the agent or process responsible for orchestrating psychic activity to begin with? Jung’s whole thesis could be easily (mis)interpreted to mean that there is an absolute mind, primary source, principle of the ultimate, or cosmic deity underlying all facets of the universe.

Although Jung's implicit supernaturalism has been a major criticism of his theory, it becomes less problematic once viewed from the standpoint of evolution. He uses the example of how early man would have been exposed to the daily physical occurrences of nature, such as the cycle of day and night, which were imprinted on the primitive psyche as primordial images and preserved unconsciously, which we still reproduce today in some transmuted yet similar fashion. This is why all cultures have symbolisms of the sun that evoke a form of natural divinity as Life (e.g. Mother Nature). What this logically means is that such early primordial experiences would have been laid down within the nucleotide sequence of DNA and evolutionarily undergone genetic transmogrifications over the millennia that now predispose and influence our dreams, fantasies, imagination, and the specific imagos each individual produces within their specific familial and cultural contexts.

In much of his early writing, when he is first introducing the notions of the collective unconscious and the archetypes, Jung wants to impress upon us that his theories are based on empirical facts, even though he also relies on speculative metaphysics. Extending a natural explanandum to the collective, he postulates a dynamic imaginal life prefaced on previous archaic experiences genetically encoded and memorialized within the human psyche, only then to be transmitted transgenerationally and transculturally, hence explaining why such universal images are reproduced and why the human mind is attracted to seek these experiences and imbibe them with emotional meaning. Is it far-fetched to assume that the psychic apparatus is drawn to various colors, forms and images over others because they serve the evolutionary purpose of providing symbolic meaning imbued with aesthetic and spiritual properties?

Jung is very clear when he tells us that the collective psyche is 'impersonal' (1917, p. 66; 1947, p. 204) and 'identical' in all people (1952, p. 436). Here, any notion that the collective is a personal agency is displaced for a generic universality that comprises the psychological processes operative within human experience. However, Jung complicates matters when he says this unconscious universality 'constitutes a common psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature which is present in every one of us' (1954, p. 4). Is he implying that the collective unconscious is earlier than, hence merely beyond, the personal, viz. that it cannot be reduced to individual experience simply because these are universal structures of mind? Or is he suggesting that such a 'suprapersonal' element is indeed simultaneously above, over, greater than, and transcendent (Lat. < *supra* = above, beyond, earlier)? Jung's imposition of multiple meanings is also compounded by the fact that he changes his mind about the essential characteristics of the collective psyche over time. Here is a passage from his later writings:

I must content myself with the hypothesis of an omnipresent, but differentiated, psychic structure which is inherited and which necessarily gives a certain form and direction to all experience . . . . The archetypes, as organs of the psyche, are dynamic, instinctual complexes which determine psychic life to an extraordinary degree. That is why I also call them *dominants* of the unconscious. The layer of unconscious psyche which is made up of these universal dynamic forms I have termed the *collective unconscious*. (Jung, 1957, p. xlv)

Jung returns to equating the collective unconscious with a ubiquitous container or psychic spacing that houses the archetypes. Here he emphasizes their dominion over psychic life and that their dynamism implies they are alive, powerful, and causal.

This emphasis on psychic determinism further resonates throughout his thought from the moment he first introduced the term:

The collective unconscious comprises in itself the psychic life of our ancestors right back to the earliest beginnings. It is the matrix of all conscious psychic occurrences, and hence it exerts an influence that compromises the freedom of consciousness in the highest degree (1912, p. 112).

Jung reiterates the notion that the collective psyche is ‘the deposit of all human experience right back to its remotest beginnings . . . a living system of reactions and aptitudes that determine the individual’s life in invisible ways’ (1927, p. 157). Here the collective unconscious is not just confined to primordial images, which are ‘involuntary spontaneous manifestations’ (1964, p. 55), rather it is a ‘living system’ that animates mind. He continues to say that it is not merely the product of our ancestral history, but a ‘creative impulse’ that ‘contains the whole spiritual heritage of mankind’s evolution, born anew in the brain structure of every individual’ (1927, p. 158). Once again, this statement could avail itself to an evolutionary explanation. Our capacity to experience life in any manner is conditioned on our animal past.

Despite the fact that Jung attributes many aspects to the archaic mind, where various emendations, re-directing shifts in emphasis and conceptual modifications made their way into his mature theorizing, we can conclude that the collective unconscious has the following characteristics. It may be viewed as:

- (1) A metaphysical orienting principle underlying all aspects of mental life;
- (2) A process system instituting its own dynamic determinants, thus lending structure and ontological order to human experience;
- (3) An innate receptacle, repository, or psychic spacing where the archaic past is inherited, retained, and preserved;
- (4) The sum total amalgamation of ancestral forms of human experience that date back to the prehistory of mankind;
- (5) A highly adaptive organic, biological system subject to the natural laws of evolution; and
- (6) A cosmic template, matrix, or unifying web which all psychic experiences emanate from, intermingle with, and ultimately return to, for no human experience may be said to exist independent from the collective source.

This assessment is not without inherent difficulty, for it leads to several corollary problems. For one, we need to explain how these processes or mechanisms actually operate. Even if we come to an agreement about what constitutes human experience, we need to explicate how a primordial phenomenon was originally retained within the primitive mind and why it manifests now. How is archaic experience memorialized? How is it transmitted? It is not enough simply to offer a hypothesis that these things just happened that way and are currently operative on our present-day psyches, for we need to theoretically work out all the details in order to avoid an unsophisticated folk psychology. Perhaps we can justify in some rudimentary fashion how the earliest experiences of primitive man were genetically encoded and modified through biological transmutations over time, as this would apply to any organic developmental, evolutionary process effective within other species. Along these lines, do we wish to equate prehistoric experience with phylogenetic memories? If

predispositions or proclivities toward experiential occurrences are conditioned on the primordial past, including images, thoughts, feelings, behavioral patterns, aptitudes, fantasies, and ideation, then the penumbra and assortment of these collective experiences would have to be memorialized within the psyche and transferred (as information) over our maturation as a human species. Jung is not likely to have approved of the notion that *représentations collectives* are memories because this implies specific experiential content within a subjective context; yet, with qualifications, he does refer to the archetypes as inherited ideas, although he prefers to emphasize the imagistic. But toward the end of his life he does specifically refer to ‘archetypal memory’ from the ‘prehistoric past’ that ‘we have entirely forgotten’ (1961, p. 246). This seems more than just suggestive of phylogenetic memories populating the deep substratum of the unconscious. Regardless of the conventional meaning of memory or recollection, the term ‘memorialization’ signifies the preservative element of retaining certain psychic events, here extended to a collective psyche.

For Jung, there is a causal efficacy to the past that attempts to pull the present back to the *archē*, a metaphysical principle that is salient throughout his entire philosophy. I have explained this phenomenon under the rubric of what I refer to as the ‘principle of archaic primacy’ (Mills, 2010, pp. 54–56). The past must be ontologically preserved and operative within the present, which further influences how we approach the future, a metaphysical destiny that is diachronically superimposed on all experience. Archaic primacy holds a privileged causal status in the psyche, for mind presupposes a historicity that informs its present operations and is conditioned on all previous shapes of unconscious experience. This means that every mental form and its derivatives draw on the internalized and dialectically preserved past ensconced within an unconscious abyss, for psychic processes and their contents cannot simply pop up *ex nihilo*. Following the principle of sufficient reason, there must be a ground or origin to every mental event that stands in relation to every mental object. In principle, this is not incompatible with a collective unconscious insofar as these generic processes are universal a priori dynamic structures that compose the substratum of mind.

What becomes a most vociferous yet vexing question is whether there is a transpersonal or suprapersonal mind. What do we mean by this exactly? If we are merely saying that mind transcends or reaches beyond the actual limits of our subjective elements through imagination, fantasy, or phenomenal experiences, then that is not controversial (Lat. *trans* = beyond, through). If the transpersonal is merely universal, formal, and not subject to personal life events, then Jung can readily defend his theoretical position. If we mean that mind is transcendental (Lat. *transcendere*: *trans* = over + *scandere* = to climb), that is, surpasses itself in various forms, this is also philosophically defensible given that the a priorists devised very elaborate justifications for postulating faculties of mind that do not merely rely on sense experience for knowledge claims. Even mystical experience may (in principle) be metaphysically and psychoanalytically justified, especially when emotional, intuitive and aesthetic supplements complement the spiritual dimension of personal experience that reason is quick to prejudicially disregard. Yet, if we import a transcendent realm that is independent of the material universe, where space and time are suspended for an unembodied supernatural or cosmic paranormal order, then we must be prepared to leave the language of metaphysics and adopt another discourse. For example, Dan Merkur (1999) argues for a relocation of mysticism from

supernatural ontology to natural psychology in order to obviate these problematics. Whether or not Jung falls within this categorical realignment is not transparent. He certainly oscillates in his thinking, and the metaphysical reverberations of his ambivalence are felt.

How could there be a Cosmic Mind, a suprapersonal agency or entity that exists 'out there,' as if it is a Creator force or Source of everything we typically call God? If there is an independent agency, power, energy, or entity operating in the extant world outside of the living subject, which a fortiori animates the universe, then are we not treading into religiosity, panpsychism, anthroposophy, or some form of shamanistic folklore? Although the collective unconscious may have a certain appeal to theologians, theosophists and mystics of all types – and perhaps even for process philosophers, cosmologists and physicists – we must readily admit the difficulty that lies before us when positing a suprapersonal entity or Cosmic Being responsible for all aspects of our mental life.

Here I am concerned with delineating the problem. Of course I cannot offer a definitive answer of my own, for I am unable to resolve it. But we must attempt to offer some modicum of an explanation despite it being inherently delinquent or unsatisfactory. Can we escape the intrinsic mystery of these paradoxes? Can we broach a plausible hypothesis that lends some sensibility to our dilemma? I am doubtful, but with a trickle of hope.

If the *via mystica* leads us to the conclusion that there is a suprapersonal cosmic mind underlying all productions of psychic life, then Jung's theories will always generate incredulity. However, if we ground the transpersonal within a model of natural psychology, the metaphysical quandaries I am highlighting become less problematic because they are relegated to the domain of phenomenology rather than ontology.<sup>3</sup> Jung concedes to the limits of reason alone, and hence must resort to the life of experience, and particularly affect. If the collective unconscious answers to spiritual questions based on unitive thinking, then they have metaphorical and phenomenal value. But if mystical moments lead to ontological claims independent of scientific evidence or logical reason, then they open themselves up to being judged based on wish fulfillment, emotional prejudice, or subjective intuition imbued with idiosyncratic meaning. While subjective and objective elements of lived psychic reality exist simultaneously, we cannot escape the indubitable psychologism that ultimately grounds Jung's metaphysics. Whether this psychologism can be extrapolated to a supernatural metaphysical entity that governs the psyche of all living individuals is yet another issue.

### **The mystical nature of archetypes**

Jung's theory of archetypes is the fulcrum of his entire metaphysics and is modeled after two tensions in his thinking. The first involves his predilection for the spiritual, while the second involves his pursuit of scientific rationalism. This tension can be observed in his choosing to adopt the term archetype, which derives from the ancients, particularly Plato, is echoed in the medievalists, and is further taken up by Kant in attempting to close the divide between appearance and reality. In fact, Jung frequently makes reference to these philosophers for their attempts to describe the 'universal dispositions of the mind' which characterizes the archetype, which he argues should

be understood as analogous to Plato's forms (*eidola*), in accordance with which the mind organizes its contents. One could also describe these forms as *categories* analogous to the logical categories which are always and everywhere present as the basic postulates of reason. Only in the case of our 'forms,' we are not dealing with categories of reason but with categories of *imagination*. As the products of imagination are always in essence visual, their forms must, from the outset, have the character of images and moreover of typical *images*, which is why, following St. Augustine, I call them 'archetypes'. (Jung, 1957, p. xlv)

Here Jung emphasizes imagination and imago and, with his reference to Augustine, relocates the image within the original form in which it emanates. His lifelong preoccupation with the medievalists also finds its origin in Plato, where spirit and imago participate. Jung was attracted to Plato's notion of forms and Kant's logical categories, which condition our experiences of both the sensible world and our conceptual capacity for understanding, because each model serves as a conceptual scheme on which all experience is based and constructed. In other words, the forms and the categories become the *a priori* ground that conditions all experience. Therefore, *form* becomes the basic constituent of an archetype.

Jung's first usage of the term archetype (*Archetypus*) appears in 'Instinct and the Unconscious' (1919). His previous references to the 'primordial image' (*Urbild*) are now used almost interchangeably with the word archetype, which the editors of his *Collected Works* refer to as 'an essentially unconscious entity' (*ibid.*, p. 133, fn.7). But Jung does not make this claim here explicitly, so it is misleading to refer to the archetypes as entities, because this implies they have an ontological status apart from the experiential person. What Jung does say is the following:

We also find in the unconscious qualities that are not individually acquired but are inherited, e.g., instincts as impulses to carry out actions from necessity, without conscious motivation. In this 'deeper' stratum we also find the *a priori*, inborn forms of 'intuition,' namely the *archetypes* of perception and apprehension, which are the necessary *a priori* determinants of all psychic processes. (*ibid.*, p. 133)

Here Jung refers almost verbatim to Kant's (1781) intuitive forms of sensibility (that inform the perceptual apparatus) and the categories for understanding the sensible world as outlined in his *Critique of Pure Reason*.<sup>4</sup> Jung says they are necessary, universal and underlie *all* psychic activity of the mind. Furthermore, the archetypes 'force' themselves on human perception and 'into specifically human patterns' (*ibid.*, p.133). He continues to delineate that the instincts and archetypes are *distinct*, but together they form the content of the collective unconscious.

Drawing on his historical precursors, from the ancients to scholasticism, modern philosophy and German idealism, Jung emphasizes how archetypes are 'natural images engraved' on the human psyche that took the form of 'ideas' in a Platonic sense (1947, p. 136). He also equates them with the most ancient of universal "'thought-forms" of humanity' which have their own 'independent life' (1917, p. 66). These primordial images are essentially autonomous mental templates that 'determine the form and direction of instinct' (1919, p. 137). Here Jung introduces a causal impetus as archetype determines how drives will be enacted. He furthermore implies in this original essay ('Instinct and the Unconscious') that archetypes are a type of perceiving agency, like an ego. In his words: '*Archetypes are typical modes of apprehension, and whenever we meet with uniform and regularly recurring modes of apprehension we are dealing with an archetype*' (*ibid.*, pp. 137–138, italics in original).



This suggests that archetypes have an organizational and agentic structure all of their own. I will return to this notion shortly, but for now, let us continue to examine the chronological nature of Jung's thought.

### *From image and form to affect and fantasy*

The instincts and archetypes, Jung explains, are universal and common collective phenomena, yet he tends to equivocate on their relation to each other, stating that they 'determine one another' (ibid., p. 134). Yet the two are not the same. A primordial image is not an impersonal biological drive. As Jung's thinking matures, he goes in other developmental directions, whereby the properties of an archetype evolve in definitional character.

By 1927 Jung's views on the archetype have expanded. Here the archetypes generate 'myth-motifs' that arise from 'affect-laden fantasies' (1927, p. 155). Here fantasy becomes the experiential link to ancient imagos. Now the collective unconscious is described as 'a kind of supra-individual psychic activity' distinct from personal experience (ibid., p. 148), yet it harbors 'the ancestral heritage of possibilities of representation,' which become 'the true basis of the individual psyche' (ibid., p. 152). Here Jung may be accused of confounding universal forms or faculties that make cognition possible with the collective unconscious, which is a category mistake. Drives, for example, are not faculties of cognition; they are psychophysical urges that impel a sentient organism to act. Faculties as a priori forms of cognition allow for experience to arise and be presented to consciousness, just as perception requires the *re-presentation* of objects to be retrieved from memory, which necessarily mediates experience. Although Jung does not directly say here that images are recovered representations from the collective, he certainly does so elsewhere when he refers to archetypal figures, dream symbols, and mythological motifs as *représentations collectives* (1936/1942, p. 122; 1954, p. 41).

While the collective unconscious is the cosmic receptacle and issuance of form, the archetypes are the content of the collective without themselves having content. Yet Jung introduces content into this formless archetype when he claims that image, affect, fantasy, motifs and patterns constitute this formless property of the collective. He furthermore equivocates drive with archetype when he says that 'the archetypes are simply the forms which the instincts assume' (1927, p. 157). Here instincts transmogrify into archetypes, which Jung says are 'the very source of the creative pulse' (ibid., p. 157). Presumably Jung wants to locate the creative wellspring within instinct, while creative expression flows through the archetype. But this is not clear. He does speak of the 'creative instinct' as a psychical impulse, but he does not want to make them identical (see 1917, p. 118). Elsewhere he locates creativity within fantasy as a unifying function, which he makes the 'creative matrix of everything' (1928, p. 290) ultimately having its source within the archetypal collective. But it may be argued, as does Freud, that fantasy is the modification of drive. Jung concludes that the collective is the 'source' of 'instinctual forces,' while the forms or categories 'that regulate them' are the archetypes (1927, p. 158). Here Jung defers to his earlier position that the archetypes are merely formal.

He also affirms this position in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, when he tells us unambiguously that

the archetypes, which are pre-existent to consciousness and condition it, appear in the part they actually play in reality ... As an attribute of instinct they partake of its dynamic nature, and consequently possess a specific energy which causes or compels definite modes of behavior or impulses. (1961, p. 347)

Notice that Jung posits the archetypes to be 'pre-existent to consciousness'. This is an ontological commitment to realism. They predate the existence of the living human subject and causally condition how the individual experiences and acts. But once again Jung interjects a contradictory statement by making the archetype 'an attribute of instinct'. It is important to raise this issue, because if the archetype emanates from instinct, such as acquiring modified attributes and properties, then drive or instinct would be the ground of all psychic activity. What would follow would be that archetypes would become differentiated mental productions that appear as psychic objects derived from an original natural drive. But this is not what Jung ultimately postulates, which, I suggest, needs this added corrective. Archetypes are the ontological ground of all psychic productions since they procreate images, fantasies, and so forth, which dominate mental life. We may say they are instinctually innate, but they are not instincts in themselves. Here it would be more correct to preserve the distinction between instinct as embodied drive that belongs to the corporeality of the living subject, while archetypes retain their special status and consistent character as the 'primordial' ground of the psyche, which is the hallmark of Jung's philosophy.

What this implies is that, emanating from within the collective, there is a particular form of unconscious recognition with an image that we are drawn to as a numinous phenomenon – presumably having its origins in the minds of primitive man – such as certain shapes or colors associated with sense impressions, which is genetically encoded and transmitted over the ages. Problems arise, however, when Jung attributes 'emotional fantasies' (1927, p. 154) to archetypes in addition to powers for the 'possibilities of representations'. Here he moves from formal properties of universality to contents that have specific images and fantasies that are thematic or generic in form. Jung delineates them as patterns or motifs, so they still maintain their formal structure, but the pattern or motif itself conveys a specific content (e.g. the *anima mundi*), which may be revealed in countless ways in the personal unconscious. But Jung advances his thesis to include additional properties: form and image now acquire affect and fantasy. The 'possibilities' to represent the innumerable archetypes are unbounded. However, representations do not necessarily mean the retrieval of an idea or image that once belonged to a caveman. Although Jungians are sensitive to this issue, and are quick to defend Jung, as he did himself, it does not mean that this inference cannot be implied. Jung would say that it is not the specific image or idea itself, but the formalism that allows for these ideas and images to emerge in the subjective mind. Here he is no different than Kant. But Kant counts on conscious presentations of sense impressions occurring, what he calls the manifold world of sensible objects presented to 'intuition', before the unconscious mind can represent those images to subjective consciousness. Jung inverts this process. He requires the collective unconscious to supply the form and the properties which the conscious mind takes up. Here we cannot separate the two domains because instinct, imago, affect, fantasy and form are interdependent.

To summarize this progression: archetypes are originally devoid of content, hence they are merely formal. Despite having specific contents that vary from person to

person, themes or motifs represented in the subject's consciousness still reveal basic patterns. Jung refers to these as aboriginal shapes or patterns of mind that are both biological and transpersonal, belonging to the 'prehistoric and unconscious development of the mind in archaic man, whose psyche was still close to that of the animal . . . . This immensely old psyche forms the basis of our mind' (Jung, 1964, p. 67). This is an ontological assertion, but he draws on an evolutionary argument to support the primacy of archetypes by claiming they are instinctive processes analogous to those of birds which are hardwired to build nests. Put laconically, we have evolutionarily developed our minds in this fashion, and have a mental apparatus that perceives phenomena and structures our personal experience of reality in this manner.

### *Patterns of Behavior*

If instinct, form, image, affect and fantasy are not enough defining attributes, Jung includes 'patterns of behavior' (1947, p. 200) as another characteristic inhering in an archetype. Here instinct and archetype are conjoined, hence deviating from his original conception that the collective contained both the instincts and the archetypes. He states:

There are, in fact, no amorphous instincts, as every instinct bears in itself the pattern of its situation. Always it fulfills an image, and the image has fixed qualities: . . . it cannot exist without its total pattern, without its image. Such an image is an *a priori* type . . . . We may say that the image represents the *meaning* of the instinct. (1947, p. 201)

Jung speaks from a position of *ex cathedra*; however, his arguments are convoluted. Here he deviates radically from Freud's (1915) definition of *Trieb*. Jung makes instinct formless (viz. 'amorphous') yet patterned – itself a contradiction – and furthermore with the properties of images with 'fixed qualities' that are given a priori, namely, as innate or inborn. This is a radical proposition. Archetypes now have fixed qualities of images that are instinctually reproduced through patterned forms of thought, feeling, fantasy, and behavior. What this logically entails is that we are programmed to reproduce images and behavioral acts that were originally conditioned by early man and inherited through gradual evolution. That claim is not necessarily controversial in itself; but what is controversial is the notion that 'images' are reproduced from a fund of archaic *re-presentations* belonging to the 'collective'. This intimates a Lamarckian view of a fund of inherent phylogenetic memories within mind. Moreover, they are 'fixed' not malleable; hence they are predetermined rather than determinate. Here the collective is portrayed as more of a supernatural *mysterium*.

Jung furthermore says that the image conveys 'the *meaning* of the instinct.' This statement can be interpreted as meaning that drives have intentional states expressed through imagos, but I believe Jung is referring to the notion that they have a purpose or function for the psyche. He equivocates in separating instinct from archetype, equating behavior to instinct and image to archetype, yet he also says that the archetypes 'act like the instincts'; and he would not 'refute this possibility' of their 'identical' nature (1947, p. 205).

Jung is attempting to use the hypothesis of archetypes as a heuristic connection to explain and mediate all aspects of psychic life. By incorporating instinct within

archetypal structure, he seeks a unitive synthesis. All aspects of human psychology must be accounted for in his theoretical system in order to have a monistic theory of mind, what Jung refers to as the *unus mundus* – one unitary order that structures the universe. The doctrine of archetypes fulfills this mediating role. And behavior is no exception. The archetype postulate serves a unitary function of binding thought, image, affect and behavior within the instinctual substrate that conditions human psychology. But we may not inappropriately ask: Why do we need the archetype concept when the notion of drive may potentially explain the same thing?

Human behavior cannot be divorced from the archetypal world because primitive imagos form the basis of human motivation, which drives human action. Jung tells us: 'Archetypes are typical forms of behavior which, once they become conscious, naturally present themselves as ideas and images' (ibid., p. 227). Like Freudian drive theory, in principle, the archetype cannot be directly known, for it appears as modified content and is 'irrepresentable' in itself (ibid., p. 214). In this case, only images, ideas, and so forth are known or experienced as the transmogrification of its emanating source. But Jung goes on to refute this identity thesis between instinct and archetype, for he says that: 'Archetype and instinct are the most polar opposites imaginable' because archetype is tantamount to 'spirit' or the psychical, while instinct is tantamount to bodily urge or impulse; yet they have 'so close a bond' they are dialectically inseparable (ibid., p. 206). This is Jung's attempt to explain the mind/body problem, yet it reveals the pole of his tacit dualism. Archetype becomes the ontological bridge to mind and body. But as we will shortly see, he ultimately makes that bridge a purely psychic process.

Now that Jung has captured the breadth of human psychology within his metaphysical system, he seeks to offer an integrative paradigm that amplifies his previous emphasis on imago, fantasy, and affect. He does this by evoking the spiritual within the aesthetic and emotional life of the collective human subject. Here enters the numinous.

### *Archetype as Numinosity*

By the time Jung wrote 'On the Nature of the Psyche' (1947), the concept of the archetype had undergone more emendations. This is when Jung introduces the notion of the archetype as *numen*. Drawing on medieval astrology and the alchemists, particularly Paracelsus, he compares the collective archetypes 'in all their luminosity and numinosity' to 'cosmic projection' (ibid., p. 195) reflective of a World Soul: 'The world-soul is a natural force which is responsible for all the phenomena of life and the psyche' (ibid., p. 196). Although Jung is only making comparisons, he is suggesting that his notion of the archetypes signifies the same phenomena.

Merkur (1996), interpreting Rudolf Otto (1932), describes the *sensus numinosus* as a category of values that inspires majestic awe and splendor, which at the same time is clouded in mystery imbued with an emotional sense of urgency. This phenomenological amalgamation of psychic experience nicely captures Jung's notion of an archetype. But Jung also takes some supernatural leaps of faith in attributing spiritual and magical properties to the archetypes:

The archetypes have, when they appear, a distinctly numinous character which can only be described as 'spiritual,' if 'magical' is too strong a word . . . . It not infrequently happens that the archetype appears in the form of a spirit in dreams or fantasy-

products, or even comports itself like a ghost. There is a mystical aura about its numinosity, and it has a corresponding effect upon the emotions. (1947, pp. 205–206)

Although Jung is not technically making a metaphysical assertion about a supernatural world, instead focusing on the phenomenal appearances that appeal to the emotional and valuational processes of the experiential subject, he is nevertheless presupposing that archetypes ‘appear’ from behind the Kantian veil of the noumena, what we may attribute to the transcendent world of things in themselves as something supersensible. There is little doubt that the term numinosity is derived from this historical philosophical context, and particularly given that Kant’s (1790) major work on aesthetics, *Critique of Judgment*, was preoccupied with the question of the sublime and the teleology of nature.

Jung wants to capture the qualitative unitive sense of emotional experience that is simultaneously wondrous, affectively intense and spiritually meaningful yet shrouded in a transcendent ontology. This is why he emphasizes the ‘feeling-value of the archetype’ that ‘determines’ how it will experientially unfold (1947, p. 209). This probably has a certain eschatological significance for Jung, but it should be pointed out that this is the same language Whitehead (1929), himself an atheist, uses when he describes the emotional and value-laden aspects of the unitive processes involved in ‘prehension’ and ‘conrescence’, which he argues are the building blocks of all cosmological reality. The archetype could be viewed almost synonymously with ‘actual entities’ or, in Jung’s language, ‘psychic entities’ (1947, p. 231). For Jung, the numinous element of an archetypal image produces a dynamism and *fascinans* to lived experience that resonates as unconscious qualia.

Jung elevates the numinous character of an archetype to a ‘psychoid factor that belongs, as it were, to the invisible, ultraviolet end of the psychic spectrum. It does not appear, in itself, to be capable of reaching consciousness’ (ibid., p. 213). What exactly does Jung mean by ‘psychoid’? This is the same term posed by his first mentor and supervisor, Eugen Bleuler, at the Burghölzli psychiatric clinic, where Jung was a staff psychiatrist in his early days, before his relationship with Freud commenced (see ibid., pp. 176–177). And, parenthetically, it also might be useful to point out that the psychoid factor Jung refers to is no different *in function* than Freud’s notion of *Trieb*: a drive can never be known directly, only through its derivative manifestations.<sup>5</sup>

Jung adopts the term *psychoid* to designate a purely unconscious process as ‘elements’ incapable of being represented in consciousness (ibid., p. 184), but it is not to be equated with the unconscious itself, which is composed of many different elements, processes, contents, and so forth. However, like the archetype, he equates psychoid processes with the ‘transcendent’ (ibid., p. 213). The psychoid function is the liaison between mind and body, yet it is unclear *how* this function operates, let alone the specifics, and whether the psychoid is independent from the archetype or inheres within it. We must assume it is an organizing principle operative within the archetype because Jung locates the archetype ‘beyond the psychic sphere’ and says that ‘with its psychoid nature, [it] forms the bridge to matter in general’ (ibid., p. 216). But Jung is also inconsistent in his usage and at times equates ‘the psychoid’ with ‘factors I call archetypes’ (1952, 8: p. 515). In *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, he states that archetypal configurations ‘may be founded upon a *psychoid* base, that is, upon an only partially psychic and possibly altogether different form of being’ (1961, p. 351). Notice his tentative language here, as well as his allusion to an

ethereal realm. Yet it is only poetically suggestive. But when Jung uses language such as ‘beyond the psychic sphere’, he is clearly evoking transpersonalism. More specifically, he is referring to the Transcendent, that which lies beyond the faculties of mind.

The psychoid function is also intimately connected to Jung’s thesis on synchronicity, which is a highly transpersonal phenomenon. Synchronized moments suspend the phenomenology of spacetime, hence producing numinous affects that raise the conscious experience of objects to a ‘supernormal degree of luminosity’ (1952, p. 436) due to the intervening elements of the psychoid function. The synchronicity principle allows for the experiential relativity of ‘causeless order’, which is marked by simultaneity and meaningful correspondence of events, what Jung concludes is ‘transcendental’ (ibid., p. 506). If synchronicity is diachronic, relative to personal perspective, and displaces natural causal laws for an acasual orderliness or connecting principle that transcends our current understanding of natural science, then not only is this numinous, it also arouses the uncanny mystique of imagination, fear, and wonder.

### ***Jung’s Mature Hypothesis***

In his mature theory, Jung reiterates his earlier views on the archetypal collective in an integrative but somewhat less pedantic manner. In *Symbols of Transformation* (1911–12), he privileges collective images as inborn ideas, while later in his works he articulates the instinctual, behavioral and numinous character of the archetypes, which express themselves as affects and fantasies. Late in his life, Jung (1957) defined the archetypes as ‘eternally inherited forms and ideas which have at first no specific content. Their specific content only appears in the course of the individual’s life, when personal experience is taken up in precisely these forms’ (p. xlv). Here he emphasizes forms *and* ideas. But notice that form and idea are the Greek equivalent of ἰδέα, as ‘to form in’, taken from *idein*, to see. This is why Jung equates form with image as an idea.

In his final writing project, *Man and his Symbols*, Jung (1964) defines the archetypes in the following fashion:

They are, at the same time, as both images and emotions. One can speak of an archetype only when these two aspects are simultaneous. When there is merely the image, then there is simply a word-picture of little consequence. But by being charged with emotion, the image gains numinosity (or psychic energy); it becomes dynamic, and consequences of some kind must flow from it. (p. 96)

Here Jung emphasizes a synthetic relation or trinity between imago, emotionality, and numinosity that lead to an interactive dynamism. This represents Jung’s final word on the matter given that it was completed ten days before he died. The archetype is composed of imagos and emotions that have ‘a special feeling tone’ (ibid., p. 96) or affective-energetic structure; hence they give a certain subjective phenomenal intensity and personal meaning to experience. As he continues to state, ‘it is essential to insist that they are not mere [linguistic] names, or even philosophical concepts. They are pieces of life itself – images that are integrally connected to the living individual by the bridge of the emotions’ (ibid., p. 97). Here affect is emphasized over imago as both a mediating factor producing a numinous quality

and a unitive psychological (transcendent) function; yet it is more accurate to say that image, affect and thought form a dynamic synthetic unity. The numinous becomes the sacred symbolic that unites the emotional, aesthetic and spiritual dimension within the qualia of the concretely lived experience. This unitive experience further loses its distinctive clarity in its declension to this felt union or fusion, which may be properly attributed to the *mysterium tremendum*.

Jung also confesses to the nebulous nature of the archetypes because words cannot adequately capture their true essence. In Jung's words, he is attempting 'to describe something whose very nature makes it incapable of precise definition' (ibid., p. 97). This preserves the *via mystica* of an archetype, which also makes it incapable of being either proven or refuted. Just like the psychoid factor, which lacks explication or definitional precision in how it is structured or actually works on a functional, mechanical, or operational level, the epistemological problem of the archetype becomes displaced by the inherent valuation attributed to lived phenomenology. Is it sufficient for Jung to claim that any experience the subject has *is* reality – in other words, a psychic fact – and that is all that matters? This Gnostic opaqueness is what leads to charges of mysticism, folk psychology lacking scientific verity and that the so-called archetypes are merely personal mythologies, illusions, or fantasies one wishes to believe in.

### Integration and critique

Jung was a deeply spiritual man captivated by the marvel of the universal. The ancients called it wonder. The numinous nature of the archetype signifies that marvel united in a concrete symbolic function where all fundamental psychological characteristics and qualitative facets of human experience can participate in some semblance of harmony, even if this symbolic factor devolves into mystical abstraction. Even though he did not classify his theories this way, instead insisting they were scientific and empirical, Jung wanted to capture and potentially explain all aspects of human psychology under the rubric of his metaphysics, which ultimately rests on the doctrine of archetypes. In the end, what are we to make of his major theoretical contributions and the philosophical implications of his analytical psychology?

The archetypal collective may be viewed as residues of archaic mind grafted onto our present-day psyche with psychophysical correlates that fuse mind and body, yet the numinous nature of the archetypes ultimately commits Jung to a transcendentalism that is non-corporeal. Jung is first and foremost concerned with the quest for explicating universality, which he attributes to an a priori form. Idea, image, emotionality and behavioral manifestations coalesce into a single psychological category that serves as the ontological fabric of all mental structures. Archetypes are formal but they are comprised of inherited imagos *as* ideation, hence they are purported to be primordial perceptual content that is mediated by psychic faculties responsible for conceptual reason, affect and behavioral propensities. Although archetypes are irrepresentable in themselves, because they are only 'basic form', they nevertheless appear as images, motifs, mythologems and the like (1947, p. 213). Jung seems to be teetering on a fine line between universal form (a priori categories) and content (images as inborn ideas) on the one hand, and past (collective unconscious) and present (personal experience) on the other.

Although there is a fair amount of debate among Jungians and post-Jungians, we do not see many critiques of Jung by Jungians because, I suggest, it offends a group identification, which is taboo within that professional culture. However, I wish to open a permissible space to question Jung's major concepts not as a polemic, but as a genuine search for meaning in his philosophy and with respect for his textual word. When Jung speaks of the 'suprapersonal nature' of the collective unconscious (1954, p. 4), is this merely metaphor or ontology? Is Jung making claims about ultimate reality, or are his 'hypotheses' of the collective psyche and the archetypes simply chalked up to poetic literary aesthetics? If the latter is the case, would this not cheapen the unique value of his philosophical contributions to human psychology and the pursuit of the spiritual? Jungian apologists may warn us not to read Jung through a Jungian lens that translates the language of psychology into ontology; however, we must take him at face value. Jung makes psychic processes the foundation of all human experience, possessing a transpersonal character, and this by definition is a metaphysical treatise of mind. It is untenable to separate phenomenological psychology from metaphysics because in making any inquiry or assertion about experience and reality, the two are ontologically conjoined and mutually infer each other. Drawing on what he actually says in his written texts, my conclusion is that Jung believed that the Collective Psyche is *real* and exists independently of any individual. This is an ontological claim that surpasses any methodological agnosticism, phenomenology, or naturalized psychology.

Jung makes contradictory statements throughout his theoretical corpus, at times averring scientific empiricism, philosophical rationalism and dialectical logic, yet at the same time he differentiates mind from matter, only then to suggest that matter is an emergent property of spirit, thus pointing toward a transsubjective reality. Vacillating between viewing an archetype as an inborn idea and the possibility or potentiality for ideation wed with personal experience, his obscurantism is further evinced when he says on the one hand that the archetype is 'pure, unvitiated nature' (1947, p. 210), but on the other that it is also suprapersonal, transcendent, and beyond the sensible world. By envisioning the collective psyche as a reservoir of abstract objects inherent to cosmic process, Jung theoretically evokes a supernaturalism and aligns with disciplines sympathetic to mysticism, shamanism and theology.

Jung is very clear in stating that archetypes have a 'nonpsychic aspect' or counterpart to the cosmos connected through synchronicity, or the transcendent 'psychoid' function that supposedly mediates the 'space-time continuum.' Here he implies that the collective unconscious is a 'supernatural faculty' (ibid., p. 231) full of psychic dispositions. But how can this be? How does such a faculty exist? How are psychic forms and contents dispersed into the singular minds of individuals? Why do they materialize to begin with? How can they be omnipresent and eternal if they are only capable of being apprehended by finite subjectivity?

Are these *aporiai* adequately resolved if we translate Jung's language into the present-day equivalent of biological heredity, such as genetic attributes inscribed within DNA? Yet how could images and ideas be encoded and transmitted genetically when you need to have conscious experience and perception in order to internalize, memorialize and *re-present* those images in the mind? Jung wants to fall back on a priori formalism to explain this conundrum, and in this sense he is no different from the idealists to certain linguists who endeavor to delineate the formal structural origins of subjectivity that make conscious experience possible. But when



he evokes the spectre of transpersonalism, he is getting away from the evolutionary implications of his earlier commitments and is hinting toward supernatural emanationism. And given Jung's affinity for Plotinus and the medievalists, it is no wonder he generates contradiction and paradox. This is particularly evident when he says that the archetypes have the 'functional significance of a world-constituting factor' (1952, p. 515). If archetypes constitute the world, then we are espousing a form of creationism. And Jung is not apologetic about this speculation since he posits that synchronicity flows from 'creative acts, as the continuous creation of a pattern that exists from all eternity.' This statement is followed by a reference to God (ibid., p. 518, fn.17). Although Jung was enamored with universals and makes repeated metaphysical claims that they have existed from all eternity, we are now headed toward some form of panpsychism or cosmic theosophy.

James Hillman (1975) and the archetypal school emphasize the centrality of the phenomenology of imagos and fantasy images as the main locus of analytic work, and for this reason they largely jettison many of the metaphysical presuppositions that burden the classical Jungian corpus, including the Kantian noumena (Adams, 1997). Although further divergences exist between the classical school, the archetypalists and the developmentalists, giving rise to an often polemical and competitive exchange of ideas in Jungian circles (Samuels, 1997), the textual fact remains that Jung was committed to many transpersonal hypotheses that carried metaphysical ramifications.

Sherry Salman (1997) alerts us to Jung's monism, derived from the medieval concept of a *unus mundus* or 'one world', which is the original undifferentiated unity that binds everything – from matter to psychic energy – within the universe. It should be noted that this philosophy derives from Plotinus' emanationism. His neo-Platonism became quite attractive to Christianity, which later formed the bedrock of more sophisticated theosophies during the middle ages. In his work on alchemy, culminating in his *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, Jung (1955) shows such breadth of scholarship that most classicists would likely applaud his synthetic ambition. In this work, Jung seeks to integrate his views on the collective unconscious and archetypal psychology with the medieval tradition. He specifically champions a process view of the many within the one, and diversity within unity, yet he draws on a creationism argument extrapolated from Plotinus:

In the beginning God created one world (*unus mundus*), ... the original non-differentiated unity of the world or of Being, ... the primordial unconsciousness. While the concept of the *unus mundus* is a metaphysical speculation, the unconscious can be indirectly experienced via its manifestations. (ibid., p. 462)

Jung goes on to support a monistic ontological view where everything is interconnected; and although this generates paradoxes, despite the fact that there is a multitude of manifestations, 'they are at bottom a unity' (ibid., p. 463). If Jung is to be criticized for espousing this view, then he would be in good company with many philosophers over the centuries up to contemporary modes of process thought. Criticisms of metaphysical monism where diversity, plurality and differentiation are still dialectically tied to an interpenetrating unification system or principle of unity should not be directed toward Jung per se, for this thesis preoccupies many diverse philosophical systems from East to West, criticisms I will not entertain here. What Jung is more concerned with is how his psychology fits within the mysterious

conjunctions that are generated from this form of philosophy. For example, the mandala symbolizes the One, which he attributes to ‘the ultimate unity of all archetypes as well as of the multiplicity of the phenomenal world, and is therefore the empirical equivalent of the metaphysical concept of a *unus mundus*’ (ibid., p. 463), with synchronicity being its ‘parapsychological equivalent’.

What I believe Jung wants to secure is an empirical basis for a justified psychoanalytic metaphysics grounded through phenomenological psychology. For example, he explains that ‘insofar as the archetypes act upon me, they are real and actual to me, even though I do not know what their real nature is’ (1961, p. 352). Here he uses his subjective felt experience to avouch an ontological commitment despite conceding to the epistemological limits of his capacities to know. By focusing on the phenomenology of experience, he attempts to sidestep the pitfalls associated with speculative metaphysics; yet no matter how phenomenology is positioned, one can never escape the implicit ontological assumptions that underlie our experience of experience. This is why Jung ultimately proffers a metaphysics of experience that is conditioned by the archetypal collective. For Jung, the archetypes are a necessary condition of experience, without which the human mind would not exist as we presently understand it. This archaic cosmic or suprastructural condition of the collective psyche must have an origin or source, and this is justified by the metaphysical argument for one unitary world. All actual and possible experience must be accounted for within the psychic universe Jung calls the transpersonal unconscious, which is the original union or latent unity of the world. This theoretical conviction clearly mirrors Jung’s quest for holism.

The ‘contemplation of the transcendental *unus mundus*, the potential world outside time’ (1955, p. 505), was clearly a pivotal notion underlying Jung’s metaphysics of the archetype. What creates more scepticism is his scattered references to the archetype as a ‘transcendental entity’ in which the empirical world emerges from this ‘transcendental psychophysical background’ (ibid., pp. 536–538). The word ‘entity’ is used here not to denote a thing or object in the empirical world, but rather, I suggest, an agent or subject. Earlier conceived as ‘psychic entities’ (1947, p. 231), archetypes are now viewed as supernatural or transpersonal, hence they are not merely psychic; or in Jung’s words, they ‘have a nature that *cannot with certainty be designated as psychic*’ (ibid., p. 230, italics in original). Between his caveats, discursive qualifications and scholarly elucidations of others’ points of view, with interspersed slippery slopes, it is hard to pin him down on the theoretical minutia of his philosophical commitments. But we must pursue our line of inquiry further. This brings us to the nature and question of agency.

Jung tells us that archetypes ‘manifest themselves only through their ability to *organize* images and ideas’ (ibid., p. 231). This implies agency. Elsewhere he says that it is not the individual person organizing such activity, but rather the archetype itself ‘speaking through him’ as a transcendental agent (1961, p. 352). Whom or what is organizing these experiences? Here Jung does not speak of the ego, self or subject; rather, he refers to the *archetypes themselves* organizing the subject’s experience as if they are autonomous agents within the mind. In fact, earlier he says that ‘they are experienced as spontaneous agencies’; their very ‘nature’ is derived from ‘spirit’ (1947, p. 216). Although he says they are ‘experienced’ as independent ‘forces’ or ‘energies’, hence invoking phenomenology, he attributes their essence to an ontological substrate, ‘a solidity underlying all existence’ (1961, p. 358). This is a very Hegelian idea, yet Jung surprisingly held Hegel in contempt for supposedly

espousing a grandiose theory of mind similar to that of a megalomaniac or schizophrenic (see 1947, p. 170; 1926, p. 320). But spirit (*Geist*) and psyche are conceivably two interchangeable constructs that refer to a 'psychic category' (1936/1942, p. 120) as well as the coming into being of the collective unconscious.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast, Jung describes how an archetype 'can break with shattering force into an individual human life and into the life of a nation. It is therefore not surprising that it is called "God"' (1955, p. 552). Jung is not equating the archetype with God, only the corresponding linking-experience of the numinous that it semiotically and affectively evokes, which *appears* as an autonomous presence that takes possession of the mind. However, Jung may be said to covertly espouse his own grandiosity by elevating the archetype to the status of a deified agency responsible for the numinous phenomena that the experiential subject encounters. He furthermore attributes this numinosity to the 'psychoid aura that surrounds consciousness' (1955, p. 551), a concept that remains nebulous and ill-defined, something of a *mysterium coniunctionis* in itself. But what Jung is clear about is that 'when we talk of God or gods we are speaking of debatable images from the psychoid realm. The existence of a transcendental reality is indeed evident in itself' (ibid., p. 551). Here I interpret Jung as first acknowledging the agnosticism of the origin of the image, which is dubious, yet it is mediated through some unarticulated transcendental faculty that gives it organizational clarity, order, and meaning. At best we can attribute this function to fantasy. But Jung makes this a 'transcendental reality.' He goes on to say:

That the world inside and outside ourselves rests on a transcendental background is as certain as our own existence, but it is equally certain that the direct perception of the archetypal world inside us is just as doubtfully correct as that of the physical world outside us' (ibid., p. 551).

Is it so certain that a 'transcendental background' is needed to explain these phenomena, let alone that they exist in the first place? And would not the explanation of *fantasy* answer to the psychological need to posit *certainly* to begin with?

My interpretation of these statements is that Jung has officially abandoned the notion that the archetypal collective is only formal, hence comprised of universal structures of subjectivity that condition our conscious experience of the world, for the idea that they are extant suprapersonal realms of cosmic process responsible for all psychic productions the human mind manufactures. Therefore, they are causally determined by this transcendent reality, for, following this logic, there would be no mental productions without the archetypal world. This makes human experience necessarily dependent on the transpersonal netherworld, what could easily be equated with some form of supernatural intelligence that orbits and/or suffuses the natural world. We must question whether it is legitimate to attribute agency to archetypes. How could they pre-exist as entirely extra-psyche agencies in the mind? How could they have any agency at all? Just exactly how could such agentic processes function? How could they have ego-functions of processing and unifying information or performing synthetic activity, let alone possess meaning-making signifying powers and properties?

If we sustain this line of thinking further, the concept of the collective unconscious collapses into a macroanthropos. Here archetypes take on a hypostatized quality, to the point that they may be viewed as supernatural structures inherent in

the cosmos rather than a psychic faculty that allows for experience to materialize, such as Kant's categories, Fichte's principles (*Grundsätze*) as transcendental acts of mind, or Hegel's dialectic (*Aufhebung*). In this way, Jung deviates from primordial form and gives archetypes a transpersonal organizational ontology that conditions the quality of experience for individuals and cultures, and hence he elevates the archetype to a majestic or divine provenance.

Is Jung committing a genetic fallacy? Does he presuppose that all internal experiences and contents can be traced back to their most basal roots, which are held to be the causal determinants of all present experiences that furthermore retain their original attributes and properties, constituted long ago? Is he drawing an inappropriate conclusion that the reconstructed trace or path back to origins presumes that present experience contains the same properties as it may have held at one time in the archaic past? When Jung says that psychic energy 'follows its own gradient down into the depths of the unconscious, and there activates what has lain slumbering from the beginning' (1917, pp. 66–67), he is presuming that prehistoric mind would be preserved in its original manner. This assumes that psychic contents would not undergo transmutation and, like an artefact, can be unearthed and discovered as they once existed. But this notion is highly suspicious. Because we do not have direct access to things in themselves, especially the mental contents of primitive man; we can only speculate, interpret and creatively construct meaning based on our plausible inferences. We make reasonable comparisons between particulars and universals, but are we philosophically justified to equate the concrete present with the abstract past as being identical in composition? To assume that these ancient forces and contents would be perfectly preserved within an archaic transpersonal psyche and transmitted in any form seems to imply that everything is a reproduction from an antecedent stage in the history of the human race rather than the cognitive modification of one's own personal life history that is mistaken for prehistory.

Critics pose the question: Do we need the collective unconscious hypothesis to explain archetypal phenomena? For example, it may be argued that human experience becomes memorialized as communal knowledge that gives rise to social practices, symbols, rituals and linguistic orders that inform cultural anthropology, and that these historical remembrances become transgenerationally and transculturally transmitted over the millennia. You do not need to appeal to a collective transcendent psyche to explain these universal phenomena save only in the formal sense that there must be a collection of individual subjects that form the greater collective consciousness that is part of our objective social existence. Appealing to a supernatural entity that becomes the ontological ground for human experience is unnecessary and introduces a whole host of philosophical conundrums.

As Dan Merkur points out,<sup>7</sup> one could object to the use of my term 'supernatural' because this presupposes an inherent duality between nature and spirit or psyche. Jung's unique brand of *Naturphilosophie* is indeed an attempt to dialectically bridge that dichotomy; however, he does not conceptualize the natural as metaphysical. Rather, he makes the archetypal collective something that stands above or beyond the mere natural as Transcendent; hence he reinstates oppositionality and difference despite their underlying monistic order. Although psyche is naturalized, it is Something More than its corporeal embodiment. When Jung introduces the notion of synchronicity, the archetype now fully acquires the status of an independent being that simultaneously is experienced within the psyche, but it still lies beyond

individual agency. Although archetypes are the *locus classicus*, synchronicity becomes the *causus belli*. For example, Jung wants to reclaim the spiritual function of what religion has typically addressed under the guise of the supernatural by making it an aspect of the psyche. Here religion itself becomes transformed into ontological psychology as a naturalized psychic system, but this system is ultimately informed by a suprapersonal netherworld.

Jung would likely challenge this by replying that although images, symbols, ritualistic behaviors and so forth developed throughout the slow progression of human civilization, they could not have been simply transmitted cross-generationally or transculturally because they happen everywhere in every society. Cultures that were geographically and temporally segregated from one another, and hence had no communication with each other whatsoever on the human history timeline, nevertheless experienced psychic phenomena that were universal to all people at all times and places, personified by primordial images. But images are ubiquitous and empirical. There is nothing supernatural or mystical about them in themselves, for they are common to all of us. This is part of our natural thrownness, namely, that which is given. There is no magic to them, because this is how we perceive and think as human beings. They are simply part of our a priori nature, not a supernatural agency. Common experiences happen throughout the world regardless of culture, time and history. An emotion is a specific affective experience regardless of who is having it, or when and where. Could it be plausible that instead of summoning a magical sea of transcendent objects derived from an anthropic psyche, we may more humbly conceive of archetypes as psychic contents derived from internalized personal experience of images embedded within our culture and the environs that penetrate our minds from birth onward?

Jung's doctrine of the archetypes becomes an all-encompassing psychic category that potentially explains every facet of human psychology. Whether Jung is successful in achieving this goal is disputable. Jung has been accused of espousing and living his life based on a psychomythology as a substitute for religion (Wehr, 1985). Is the belief in an archetypal collective merely a fiction or illusion, an exalted anthropomorphic projection, or perhaps a deposit from omnipotent infantile fantasies still clamouring for wish fulfillment? We have good reason to suspect that Jung's longing for wholeness is the passion behind his philosophy, and that the sober logic of reason or antiseptic science could not answer or fulfill the greater metaphysical questions and spiritual quandaries we perennially face. Jung found some consolation in the *via mystica*. This is his answer to the question of complexification. I think a more generous reading of Jung, and in the spirit of his life project, is that the pursuit of the *numinosum* is what brings a qualitative exuberance and existential purpose to life that grounds our own personally created metaphysics of experience. Whether this applies to an objectivist epistemology or to social or scientific consensus is not the issue. We define our reality through our experience of the world mediated through mind. In this way, Jung's metaphysics shares intimate affinities with the Idealist tradition of philosophy.<sup>8</sup>

One conundrum Jung perpetually faces is that he is begging the question of human spirituality as a transcendent eternity, when it can be persuasively argued that one does not need a transpersonal psyche or metaphysical divinity to explain the numinous. This conclusion, of course, meets with little emotional satisfaction, for man is a wishing animal. It is all too human to attempt to find a rational system that fulfills our wishes, but in the end, we cannot simply dismiss our fundamental desires

as illegitimate or conclude that psychological dynamics are irrelevant to metaphysical speculations or theological hope. Our appetite, longing, or spiritual pining does not eradicate the fact that it originally comes from somewhere. Whether we call this archetype, instinct, evolution, intuition, mysticism, or faith, it may very well sufficiently justify a belief in the transcendental. Whether such belief is an illusion reflective of a complex psychological dynamic is yet another issue. The point is we experience its call. The human spirit knows no negation.

The conclusion that we cannot help but draw is that Jung, like most of us, is chasing after God<sup>9</sup> – and we all want the comfort of a divine provenance where our anxieties are ameliorated and we can finally participate of solace and deep peace free of suffering, where bountiful pleasure, contentment, ultimate meaning, or any descriptor we call bliss is guaranteed to be our granting salvation. And for Jung, God is synonymous with the unconscious.<sup>10</sup> The truth of our pathos is that we can never know what lies beyond.<sup>11</sup> But what we do know is that we are all headed for a pine box. Here our Being-toward-death becomes the primal ground (*Bythos*) underlying our spiritual anxieties, perhaps even the impetus fueling our unitive wish to return to a collective origin, what we might call home.

## Notes

1. Because the term ‘metaphysics’ was such an explosive issue for Jung, and remains so today for his apologists, it becomes important to offer an adumbrated explanation of its philosophical usage. Metaphysics signifies Being, existence and reality, that which *is*. It is often contrasted with empiricism as a scientific endeavor and phenomenology as an experiential factor, when metaphysics subsumes these categories within a unifying perspective that accounts for all facets of human subjectivity including the nature of the psychological or spiritual, as well as religion as a naturalized human inquiry. Therefore, when we speak of metaphysics, we do not need to bifurcate the empirical from the phenomenological, for speculative propositions about psychic reality are simultaneously metaphysical phenomena.
2. In many ways the collective unconscious is anticipated by Hegel’s conception of Absolute Spirit (*Geist*) as the sum totality or self-articulated complex holism that defines psychic process (see Kelly, 1993; Mills, 2002). Specifically, refer to Hegel’s (1807) discussion of ‘unconscious universality’ within the context of collective spirit in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (*PS* §§ 460–462, 474).
3. Although ontologists from Heidegger to Sartre wish to make phenomenology the ground of Being, here I wish to retain their categorical distinction, for Jung was attempting to highlight lived experience while privileging the greater metaphysical conditions that make experience possible.
4. Particularly see I. Part 1, Sec. 1–2; Part 2, Bk 1, Sec. 3.
5. Freud’s notion of *Trieb* is usually interpreted as a ‘borderline concept’ between the somatic and the psychical, which, it could be argued, Jung substituted for archetype, with the psychoid further being an intervening animating principle that straddles the two spheres and institutes a unifying function. This is particularly relevant to the nature of synchronicity, where the psychoid function gathers the material world into the psychic domain and forms a meaningful unity.
6. Hegel (1807) is concerned not only about explaining individual psychology, but also about providing a universal, anthropological account of humankind. For Hegel, individuality is ultimately subordinated to higher social orders constituted in society by participating in the ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) of a collective community. This participation rests on the development of a continuous psychosocial matrix of relations that has its origin in the family. The communal spirit and the ethical law embodied within the family of communal consciousness arises from ‘the power of the nether world’ (*PS* § 462) – what one might not inappropriately call the collective unconscious. For Hegel, collective spirit ‘binds all into

one, solely in the mute unconscious substance of all' (PS § 474). This 'unconscious universality' contains the ethical order as divine law as well as the 'pathos' of humanity, the 'darkness' of the 'underworld' (PS § 474).

7. Personal communication (2010).

8. In his memoir, Jung (1961) expresses the idealist pole of his thinking this way: 'Human consciousness created objective existence and meaning, and man found his indispensable place in the great process of being' (p. 256).

9. John Freeman, the BBC reporter and deputy editor of the *New Statesman*, recorded an interview with Jung in March 1959 that was first broadcast on the radio later that year and afterwards as a film. Jung's biographer, Gerhard Wehr (1985), tells us:

The interview contained the remarkable passage in which the reporter swung from Jung's childhood experiences and religious upbringing in the Jung family parsonage to the present, posing the direct question of whether he believed in God now. 'Now?' Jung replied, and paused for a moment like a subject in one of his association experiments on the hot seat. Then he admitted that it was really quite a difficult question. And to the surprise of his listeners he added very definitely: 'I know. I don't need to believe. I know.' (p. 440)

This sentiment echoes Jung's earlier view in 'Spirit and Life' where he says that 'God is a psychic fact of immediate experience, otherwise there would never have been any talk of God' (1926, p. 328).

10. 'I prefer the term "the unconscious", knowing that I might equally well speak of "God" or "daimon" if I wished to express myself in mythic language. When I do use such mythic language, I am aware that "mana", "daimon" and "God" are synonyms for the unconscious' (Jung, 1961, pp. 336–337).

11. Contra Kant, who believed that there was always a firm epistemological limit to pure reason or absolute knowing, Hegel believed that mind readily grasps the *Ding un sich* by virtue of the fact that we posit it. In the act of positing, we have already breached the limit. Here he employs an argument similar to Anselm's ontological proof for the existence of God; however, just because we can conceive of an idea does not mean that we can think something into existence.

### Notes on contributor

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