

# The Black Foe: Being Towards Death<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The ontology of death is universal, hence archetypal. Nowhere do we witness any organic creature escape its talons. Analytical psychology has had an intimate relationship to death for the simple fact that it contemplates the soul, the numinous, and an afterlife. From Hegel to Heidegger, Freud and Jung, death was an existential force that sustained and transformed life, the positive significance of the negative. Rather than merely a destructive phenomenon, death informs Being, the power of nothingness that dialectically drives life. In this paper, I will introduce the notion of what I call the *omega principle*, the psychological orientation and trajectory of our being towards death, which we may say is a universal preoccupation and recapitulation of the collective unconscious that subsumes our personal relation to death, an eternal return of the objective psyche constellated as *esse in anima*.

*Keywords:* philosophy of death, ontology of death, Being, Jung on the afterlife, Heidegger, the omega principle

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## The Philosophy of Death

No words can placate, intellectualize, or rationalize away our private encounter with death, for life hangs by a hair (*de pilo pendet*). Despite the impersonality of death and our brute rational acceptance of the implacability of finitude, logos cannot prevent the inevitable. Although there is an inherent teleology to both life and death, death becomes our final aim and destiny. In the somber words of Quintilian, everything that is born passes away (*deficit omne quod nascitur*).

The fantasy of a return goes back to the ancients. The Primordial cosmic unity, the Neoplatonic One, the myth of the eternal return, the *eschaton*—all

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have to do with the fantasy of a return to origins. The return fantasy has metaphysically and symbolically conditioned culture since the time of civilization, such as in the need for a cosmogonic ordering principle, Godhead, or eternity, like the view that the cosmos has always been infinite (*Ananta*) and uncaused, such as in the Vedic tradition or its permutation as the *Ein Sof* in Kabbalah. And for the Neoplatonists, all that exists—the many—is contingent upon the one as an unconditioned unity that conditions all unity (*Enneads*, V.3[49].15.12–14). Here One is a unity of singularity that conditions all being. Singularity as unitarity is the essence of anything that exists, as the existence of all things is being. Yet the One is indivisible and is the original cause of being. There is no division, no separation, no difference within pure identity. It embraces a simplicity thesis of the rudimentary presence of identity where everything is collapsed into solitariness. The solitary is also further intimately connected to the notion of nothingness as “that which is not one (*oude hen*)” (Plato, *Republic*, 478b), which Plotinus espouses (*Enneads*, V.2[11].1.1). Only one exists or it is nothing (*ouden*). So we either return to One or have never left it. Symbiosis, the merger fantasy, a return to a tensionless state—all presuppose a cosmogony of holism, a participatory metaphysics with divinity, a heavenly Eden or its equivalent in other religions, and peace, hence death (tensionlessness).

### Jung on Death

The Chilean diplomat and writer Miguel Serrano, who had travelled widely in India studying yoga, and who had close friendships with Jung and the poet Hermann Hesse towards the end of their lives, visited Jung less than one month before his death at his house in Küsnacht. In his interview with Jung in his study he describes how “Jung was seated beside the window, dressed in a Japanese ceremonial gown, so that in the light of the late afternoon he looked like a magician or a priest of some ancient cult” (Serrano 1961, p. 465). After giving him a gift, Serrano said that he had just come from visiting Hesse where they had talked about death:

I asked Hesse whether it was important to know if there was something beyond death. Hesse had said that he thought not, that he thought that death was probably like entering the collective unconscious, falling into it, perhaps.

Jung replied:

Your question was badly put. It would be better phrased in this way: Is there any reason to believe that there is life after death?

“And is there?” responded Serrano:

Were it possible for the mind to function at the margin of the brain, it would be incorruptible.

“Is such a thing possible?”

Parapsychological phenomena suggest that it is. I myself have experienced certain things which also indicate it. Once I was gravely ill, almost in a coma. Everybody thought that I was suffering terribly, but in fact, I was experiencing something extremely pleasant. I seemed to be floating over my body, far above it. Then after my father died, I saw him several times. Of course that does not mean that he in fact appeared. His appearances may have been entirely subjective phenomena on my part. (Serrano 1961, p. 466)

Jung was referring to his space dream he reported in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (Jung 1961, p. 289) after he suffered a heart attack and had a near death experience where he had the most profound sense of euphoria merging with the cosmos. Serrano continued:

But isn't it possible that all these things are in fact external and objective, and not merely something which happens in the mind? Hesse talks about the Collective Unconscious as if it existed externally, and he considers that death may merely be a *falling* into that state. (Serrano 1961, p. 466)

In a lecture Jung (1958) gave at the Basel Psychology Club, he was asked a question of whether or not we can assume that individual consciousness continues after death? Although he replied that we can never know that, he offered “an opinion about it with the help of the unconscious”, for “the unconscious obliges and produces dreams which point to a continuation of life after death” (p. 377). Jung had reported dreams and several experiences of psychic phenomena associated with people who died or were about to die (Harding, 1948, p. 183). But in his famous *Face to face* interview with John Freeman (1959) for BBC television, Jung questions if death really is an end because the psyche, he asserts, is not confined to space and time nor is it “subjected to those laws”, hence pointing toward a psychical existence beyond the material world as a “continuation of life” (p. 437). And in an interview with the English journalist Gordon Young (1960) just before Jung's 85<sup>th</sup> birthday, Jung states “it is just as legitimate to believe in life after death as it is to doubt it” (p. 448).

### Being towards Death

Heidegger (1927) asks whether we can obtain an ontologically adequate conception of death as an existential question belonging to the character of Dasein or the human subject as being in the world. As Being-at-an-end (*Zu-*

*Ende-sein*) in death (§ 45., 234, p. 277), we must face the existential nature of our lived experience as a particular understanding of ourselves. The peculiar relation we have is only as Being towards death (*Sein zum Tode*), which is a form of authentic relatedness to one's inexistence that is to come. Because existence by definition is incomplete, only the actuality of death may be complete, hence total, final, or whole. But any gain in becoming whole comes at the loss of Being.

Heidegger tells us that "Dasein must, as itself, *become*—that is to say, *be*—what it is not yet" (§ 48., 243, p. 287). Because the denial of death underlies an unconscious anxiety we'd rather not focus on, the demands of living an authentic life beckons the brute need to ponder and reflect on death as a value that informs our concrete existence that will come to an end; and this aspect of our ontological thrownness should become a moral impetus to improve our lives through genuine comportment, what Heidegger calls the still inner voice of conscience. Unlike Jung, the value of life therefore lies in the realization that it is temporary, which summons our own-most authentic potentiality-for-Being-a-whole as the very meaning of its Being as care, a caring that extends to all of our activities. To care is that something matters now. In other words, to be is to care as a primordial relation to temporality. Death is the end of time, the end of agency, hence no longer Being-there (*Nicht-mehr-da-sein*) as Dasein.

Death looms as the impending "not-yet" we are thrown towards as part of our existential condition, the ontology of the not—where negation suffuses the very fabric of our essential Being. Ending, stopping, perishing, exiting, being used-up, passing-over-into, finishing, expiring, demising—are euphemisms and signifiers of the *no more*. Death as the phenomena of life is the privative relation to our lived encounters even though we don't know what death is like: epistemic erasure (~~know~~) No!—the barring of subjectivity, the foreclosure of Being.

For Heidegger, "Death is a way to be, which Dasein takes over as soon as it is" (§ 48., 245, p. 289). Here death becomes a negative totality with a positive valence, for nonbeing is predisposed in any discourse on living. This finishedness, this disappearing we face, that which is outstanding, becomes a basic state of being human, which saturates the fundamental characteristics of our Being in the world: (1) *existence* as Being "ahead-of-itself", (2) *facticity* as "Being-already-in" and (3) *falling* as "Being-alongside" everyday entities within the world (§ 50., 250, p. 293). Being towards the end as the phenomenology of the not-yet is a basic comportment of who we are as that which is distinctively impending, stands before, and is there-with-us. The question therefore becomes, how do we live and understand our impending death? It is only in our own-most potentiality for Being as a solitary mode of authentic self-relatedness that we can ever come to offer an adequate answer, the task of individuation.

## The Omega Principle

Heidegger (1927) insists that “the topic of a ‘metaphysic of death’ lies outside the domain of an existential analysis of death” (§ 49., 248, p. 292), but I must demur. Can we posit a destructive element to the collective psyche that mirrors the destructive forces we observe in the physical world on a cosmic plane? I have something more in mind than Freud’s concept of the death drive or Jung’s notion of a universal Shadow. What if everything revolves around Endings? The end is recapitulation, eternal repetition, an infinite finitude reimposed on a metaphysical level that saturates all Being. From nonconsciousness (nothingness) we emerge only to unconsciously resume, hence restore as reappearance of our nascent beginning. Nothingness saturates existence, in order for nothing to exist forever. In other words, Nothingness conditions Being.

We have no real permanence, no comfort or ontological security, for everything is transient and decays—from dust to dust. We have our moments of lived experience, such as pleasure, satisfaction, and enjoyment (*jouissance*), as we do suffer (*pathos*), but it all comes to an end in our finite lives. The depressing antidote is fraught by the defensive (hence wishful) posit of a futurity without ending—an afterlife or eternal life, the seduction of immortality as a transcendental illusion that provides some reprieve from the austerity of the hopelessness of eluding death. We do not want to face this predetermined ontological thrownness—the certainty of nonbeing we are destined to embrace with or without consent. That is why psychic activity is in the service of displacement: we all want to escape from death even if by suicide. By replacing inexistence through allusion to some other extant object or realm, substituting or transferring it onto something else, as it were, we are constantly reinforcing the primacy of the negative.

But can we go further? What if nothingness is existence? That Being is literally No-Thing? Everything is timeless (eternal) process within a sea of beings (or entities) that are temporally curtailed in their being. The cosmological One, the Whole, the Absolute is really a series of *perishings* (of objects and subjects) merging with its origins as nonconsciousness, nonbeing, or nothingness. We know nothing of where we come from, only that we find ourselves here and will expire. This is not the same question as the empirical biological explanation of birth from a reproductive organism. It is about the equiprimordiality of existence born/e from the *via negativa*, the ontology of the not.

The end is ontologically imbued from the start, what we might call the *omega principle*, the spiral that begins and ends as a return to itself as interiorized negativity. We are governed by it the moment we are born and are causally destined to return to nothingness. Unlike Parmenides and Lucretius who say from nothing comes nothing (οὐδὲν ἐξ οὐδενός), because everything is teleologically oriented to die, to perish, to be expunged from existence, and

yet this is the cycle of existence, this places nothingness at the centre of being. “I am nothing, I have no self, I have no permanence, I am merely a mirage of attachments to perceptions and ideas that are temporary and ephemeral” says the Buddhist sage, referring to the illusion of being: the *void*—nothing—is the absolute ontological principle. Here I am merely a facsimile or hologram of existence, not a real entity, but rather an epiphenomenon of the pervasive inter-dispersement of the negative.

Bioscience confirms that we are dying the minute we are born, that cells are deteriorating as we grow, and that we are all headed for a gurney with a toe-tag. Here death saturates life. It telegraphs the inevitable when we cast eyes on an old person. When we encounter death for the first time as a child, we are told that person is no longer alive, hence no longer exists. They simply vanished. And we know intuitively in our interior that the end is causally determined and it is just a matter of time before its my turn. This produces such existential anxiety for the masses that we have the need to invent God (Mills 2017), to mollify the worries of small children with transcendental promises of heaven, and placate social collectives through the advent of religion. But we die all the same. Even an imbecile knows there is a brute terminus imposed upon us against our will.

The omega principle acts within the organism as negative interiority, within our social collectives as privation, aggression, and destructiveness, and is embedded within the concept of world as deterioration and regeneration, and in the cosmos itself as the ontological necessity of entropy. Why? Because reality is process and is never static, an eternal series of passing away out of and returning to nothingness. And because we lack—the primal presence of absence that can never be satiated or fulfilled—we are always metaphysically immersed in nonbeing.

I personally see no overarching purpose or disambiguation we can assign to death, other than the meanings we generate for ourselves. Just like our birth and our miraculous, astronomical thrownness into a life-supporting universe, it merely happens. Even if we grant death the final cause of existence, understanding does not take away from the human angst it generates. Here death should be respected as an incentive to live life while you can, and this means to maximize the cultivation and incorporation of experience. In our being toward passing, namely, the here-and-now presence of our felt-relation to a future ending, comes the realization that our time here on earth is precious, for death is the end of becoming.

If the aim of all life is death, then we are all preparing for rest, a tensionless state where we no longer feel anxiety and suffer, the culmination and fulfillment of life. God was invented to extinguish our suffering. Here there is no difference: death is the terminus of pain. In other words, death is eternal peace, the end to all negativity and conflict, the cessation of our *pathos*. From nothingness we emerge and into nothingness we return. Here we may say that death is becoming unconscious, or in Hesse’s and

Heidegger's words, "falling" into that state of the timeless-eternal collective, *ab origine*.

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### TRANSLATIONS OF ABSTRACT

L'ontologie de la mort est universelle, et ainsi archétypale. Nous ne voyons nulle part une créature organique échapper à son emprise. La psychologie analytique a eu une relation intime avec la mort du simple fait qu'elle contemple l'âme, le numineux et l'au-delà. De Hegel à Heidegger, Freud et Jung, la mort était une force existentielle qui soutenait et transformait la vie, la signification positive du négatif. Plutôt qu'un simple phénomène destructeur, la mort façonne l'Être ; la puissance du néant qui conduit dialectiquement la vie. Dans cet article, je vais présenter l'idée que j'appelle le *principe oméga* ; l'orientation et la trajectoire psychologiques de notre être allant vers la mort, dont nous pourrions dire qu'il s'agit d'une préoccupation et d'une récapitulation universelle de l'inconscient collectif, qui englobe notre relation personnelle à la mort, un retour éternel de la psyché objective constellée en tant qu'*esse in anima*.

*Mots clés*: philosophie de la mort, ontologie de la mort, Être, Jung sur l'au-delà, Heidegger, le principe oméga

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Die Ontologie des Todes ist universell, also archetypisch. Nirgendwo sehen wir, wie ein organisches Wesen seinen Krallen entkommt. Die Analytische Psychologie hat eine enge Beziehung zum Tod weil sie die Seele, das Numinose und ein Leben nach dem Tod betrachtet. Von Hegel bis Heidegger, Freud und Jung war der Tod eine existentielle Kraft, die das Leben aufrechterhielt und verwandelte, die positive Bedeutung des Negativen. Der Tod ist nicht nur ein destruktives Phänomen, sondern informiert das Sein, die Macht des Nichts, die das Leben dialektisch antreibt. In diesem Aufsatz werde ich den Begriff des, wie ich es nenne, *Omega-Prinzips* einführen, der psychologischen Orientierung und Flugbahn unseres Seins zum Tod, von dem wir sagen können, daß es eine universelle Beschäftigung und Rekapitulation des kollektiven Unbewußten ist, das unsere persönliche Beziehung zum Tod umfaßt, eine ewige Wiederkehr der als *esse in anima* konstellierte objektiven Psyche.

*Schlüsselwörter:* Philosophie des Todes, Ontologie des Todes, Sein, Jung über das Jenseits, Heidegger, das Omega-Prinzip

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L'ontologia della morte è universale, perciò archetipica. Da nessuna parte vediamo una creatura organica sfuggire ai suoi artigli. La psicologia analitica ha avuto una relazione intima con la morte per il semplice fatto che essa contempla l'anima, il numinoso e l'aldilà. Da Hegel a Heidegger, Freud e Jung, la morte è stata una forza esistenziale che ha sostenuto e trasformato la vita, il significato positivo del negativo. Piuttosto che essere semplicemente un fenomeno distruttivo, la morte informa l'Essere, il potere del nulla che dialetticamente guida la vita. In questo articolo introdurrò la nozione di ciò che chiamo il *principio omega*, l'orientamento e la traiettoria psicologica del nostro essere verso la morte, che possiamo dire sia una preoccupazione universale e una ricapitolazione dell'inconscio collettivo che sussume la nostra relazione personale con la morte, un eterno ritorno della psiche oggettiva costellata come *essere nell'anima*.

*Parole chiave:* filosofia della morte, ontologia della morte, Essere, Jung sull'aldilà, Heidegger, principio omega

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Онтология смерти универсальна, следовательно, архетипична. Еще никто не встречался с тем, чтобы какое-либо органическое существо избежало ее когтей. Аналитическая психология имеет тесную связь со смертью по той простой причине, что она размышляет о душе, нуминозном и загробной жизни. Для мыслителей от Гегеля до Хайдеггера, Фрейда и Юнга смерть являлась экзистенциальной силой, поддерживающей и трансформирующей жизнь, позитивным значением негативного. Смерть – это не только разрушительное явление; она питает бытие силой небытия, которое диалектически направляет жизнь. В этой статье я формулирую концепцию, которую я назвала *принципом omega*, описывающую психологическую ориентацию и траекторию нашего бытия по направлению к смерти, являющуюся, можно сказать, всеобщей задачей и рекапитуляцией коллективного бессознательного, что включает наше личное отношение к смерти, вечное возвращение объективной психики, констеллированной как *esse in anima*.



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*Ключевые слова:* философия смерти, онтология смерти, бытие, Юнг о загробной жизни, Хайдеггер, принцип омега

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La ontología de la muerte es universal, por tanto arquetípica. Ninguna criatura orgánica escapa a sus garras. La psicología analítica ha tenido una relación íntima con la muerte por el simple hecho de que contempla el alma, lo numinoso y una vida después de la muerte. De Hegel a Heidegger, Freud y Jung, la muerte era una fuerza existencial que sostenía y transformaba la vida, el significado positivo de lo negativo. Más que un mero fenómeno destructivo, la muerte informa al Ser, el poder de la nada que impulsa dialécticamente la vida. En este artículo, introduciré la noción de lo que denomino principio omega, la orientación y trayectoria psicológica de nuestro ser hacia la muerte, que podemos decir que es una preocupación y recapitulación universal del inconsciente colectivo que subsume nuestra relación personal con la muerte, un eterno retorno de la psique objetiva constelada como *esse in anima*.

*Palabras clave:* filosofía de la muerte, ontología de la muerte, Ser, Jung sobre el más allá, Heidegger, principio omega

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黑色的敌人:向死而生

死亡的本体是普遍的，因此是原型的。我们在任何地方都无法看到任何有机生物逃脱它的爪牙。分析心理学与死亡有着密切的关系，因为它考虑的是灵魂、神性和来世。从黑格尔到海德格尔、弗洛伊德和荣格，死亡是一种维持和改变生命的力量，是负面的积极意义。死亡不仅仅是一种破坏性的现象，死亡也为“存在”提供了信息，是辩证地驱动生命的虚无的力量。在本文中，我将介绍我称为欧米茄原则的概念，即我们对死亡的心理取向，及向死而生的轨迹，我们可以说这是集体无意识的普遍关注和重述，它包含了我们个人与死亡的关系，是向聚集为实在的阿尼玛的客观心灵的永恒回归。

关键词: 死亡哲学, 死亡本体, 存在, 荣格关于来世, 海德格尔, 欧米茄原则

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